

1 John: A Commentary

Contrasts - Characteristics - Causes - Communications

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I John

Introduction

In all likelihood, I John is the first letter which first year students of New Testament Greek begin attempting to read, translate, and measure their comprehension of both accidence and syntax. It has been my unbelievable privilege to write sixteen commentaries on the NT: Acts, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude. – all of which are accessible for free online study or downloads on my personal website: archive.org/details/@mandm313, as well as Academia.edu. Now, it is hoped that my efforts with this letter will prove beneficial to any and all who read this commentary.

Perhaps, the significance of this letter is partially found in the words of Heinrich Ewald, quoted by Alford: “Never in any writing has the doctrine of heavenly Love, of a love working in stillness, a love ever unwearied, never exhausted, so thoroughly proved and approved itself, as in this Epistle” (292). Indeed, the very key-note which permeates this letter is love. As David Smith points out, “The love which it inculcates is love for God and love for the brotherhood of believers – love for God manifesting itself in love for the brotherhood, and love for the brotherhood inspired by the love wherewith the Father has loved all His children” (157).

In fact, the noun “love” (*agape*) occurs 18 times: 2:5, 15; 3:1, 16, 17; 4:7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16 (3 times), 17, 18 (3 times); 5:3. The verb “love” (*agapao*) occurs 28 times: 2:10, 15 (twice); 3:10, 11, 14 (twice), 18, 23; 4:7 (twice), 8, 10 (twice), 11 (twice), 12, 19 (twice), 20 (3 times), 21 (twice); 5:1 (twice), 2 (twice). The noun “beloved” (*agapetos*) occurs 5 times: 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11. Neither the nouns (*philos* or *philia*) nor the verb (*phileo*) for “friendly love” occur in this letter. The word for “brotherly love” (*philadelphia*) is also missing in this letter. Thus, only the high-caliber, sacrificial term for love is used in this letter.

John stresses that it is impossible to have “love” without “obedience” (2:3-6) and “love for the brothers” (2:9-11; 3:10, 14, 16, 23; 4:7-13, 20-21; 5:2).

Author

Even though there is no mention of the name of the author within the text itself, like Hebrews, the author’s claim to have been an eye-witness and in physical contact with Jesus lends credibility to the majority opinion that this was the same John “whom Jesus loved,” and the author of the Gospel account of the same name. After all, the thinking patterns in both are very similar in words, style, and concepts.

While there are no named recipients of this letter, and thus classified as a catholic (of interest to all people) or general letter, it may not be far from realism that this letter was written to a number of churches in Asia Minor; possibly even the same seven churches to whom he directs the Revelation (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea) and/or others (Robertson, 201). Its truths are certainly applicable to all churches of all centuries, regardless of the recipients of its original destination.

Seven Contrasts

There are seven major contrasts in this letter: (1) Light vs. Darkness (1:5-2:11); (2) The Father vs. the World (2:12-17); (3) Christ vs. Antichrist (2:18-28); (4) Good works vs. Evil works (2:29-3:24); (5) Truth vs. Error (4:1-6); (6) Pure love vs. Hypocritical love (4:7-21); (7) Believers vs. Non-Believers (5:1-21).

Seven Characteristics

There are seven major characteristics of Christians: (1) Righteousness (2:29); (2) Refusal to practice sin (3:9); (3) Love for one another (4:7); (4) Born of God (5:1); (5) Love of Jesus is love for God (5:1); (6) Victorious faith (5:4); (7) Protection from the wicked one (5:18).

Seven Causes *Reasons for Writing*

There are seven reasons for writing this letter: (1) Affirmation of Fellowship with God and Jesus (1:3); (2) Abundance of joy (1:4); (3) Advocacy of Jesus (2:1); (4) Advice to Fathers – Young men – Little children (2:13-17); (5) Advocates of Truth (2:21-24); (6) Avoidance of Seduction (2:26); (7) Assurance of eternal life (5:13).

Perhaps the number one underlying factor which contributed to the falsehoods, heresies, errors, and counter-Christian truths about God and human beings which impacted the writing of this letter most likely began with some of the teachings of the Greek philosopher Plato (427-347 B.C.). In short, he advocated *dualsim*: Spirit (good, mind, idea) versus Matter (evil, body, particular object). He stated that the way for human beings to strengthen themselves was through more conscious efforts toward “thinking in connection with knowledge.”

It seems hardly deniable that this stress on “knowledge” was eventually incorporated with other systems of philosophical thoughts and diverse religious teachings into what would become known in various forms and styles as *gnosticism*. The very word itself is transliterated into English from the Greek word for “knowledge” (*gnosis*). Since this religio-philosophical system is very diverse and somewhat complex, it is recommended that the reader broaden his or her information about gnosticism from a multitude of other sources (Brooke, xliii-xlvi); McDowell, 191-193; Moffatt, 156-158; Barclay, 5-12; Renwick, 484-490; Burge, 27-33; Tolbert, 9-19; Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*; Grant, 404-406; Plummer, iv-vi).

Even in the middle to late first century, it was already raising questions about both the humanity and the deity of Jesus – easily recognized in the energetic expenditure of teachings against it in 1 John. In addition to this letter, there were other leaders in the early Christian church (Justin and Irenaeus, for example) who “wrote refutations of Gnostic doctrines” (Grant, 404).

In short, the false/heretical teachings presented the church then and now with three major problems: (1) Theological threats to the Personhood of Jesus Christ; (2) Ethical threats to an adequate awareness of sinfulness which may lead to asceticism or libertinism; (3) Social threats

to the nature of love (in deed and truth) for Christian brothers in connection with love for God. Since most of the NT epistles were written to deal with difficulties and dangers created by various seductions, Plummer (iv, *PC*) suggests that “humanly speaking, we may say that, but for the pressure of Gnosticism upon the Church, the First and Second Epistles, and perhaps also the Gospel of St. John, would never have been written.” Plummer’s correlation and presentation of the essence of the gnostic impact on the Christian faith is excellent (iv-vi). So, while the controversies in which Paul was engaged centered more on the law vs. faith, with John they centered more on the person of Christ (humanity and deity).

The terms in 1 Jn. and 2 Jn. to describe the “gnostics, gnosticism” are: (1) “liar, (2:4, 22, 4:20; (2) those who “lie” (2:21); (3) those trying “to deceive” (2:26; 3:7; cp. 2 Jn. 7); (4) “spirit of deceit” (4:6); (5) “antichrist, antichrists” (2:18 [twice]), 22; 4:3 – cp. 2 Jn. 7).

Also, one of the gnostic claims was that “intellectual illumination” was more important than “righteousness.” Their position was that “righteousness” could not come as a result of faith but would, in fact, come with the higher or more advanced “knowledge” which was granted to those who submitted to man’s spiritual well-being through their spiritual platform. So, “what man needs is *gnosis* or knowledge that will enable his spirit to escape from the material universe and be reunited with God” (Tollbert, 12), thus attaining “righteousness.”

It is somewhat interesting, however, that the noun “righteous” (*dikaio*s) occurs 6 times in this letter in regard to God (1:9), Jesus Christ (2:1, 29; 3:7), and Abel (3:12), but only once in relation to Christians. The other noun “righteousness” (*dikaio*sune) occurs only twice in relation to Christians (2:29; 3:7). Its only other occurrence in 3:10 concerns those who are not of God and do not practice “righteousness.” So, the significance of John’s marginal use (3 times) of these two terms may be slightly exaggerated by some authors as they strive to highlight this component of the budding gnostic teachings in the middle to late first century.

Furthermore, as an alternative to the “knowledge” within gnosticism’s speculations, John offers “knowledge” (*ginosko*) within God’s revelation: 2:3, 4, 5, 13, 14, 18, 29; 3:1 (twice), 6, 16, 19, 20, 24; 4:2, 6 (twice), 8, 13, 16; 5:2, 20. That is, he fights fire with fire.

Seven Communicatons

There are seven communications or sayings (*lego*) (“If we say” – “He who says”): (1) False vs. True Communion (1:6); (2) False vs. True Certainty (1:8); (3) False vs. True Confidence (1:10); (4) False vs. True Confession (2:4); (5) False vs. True Conduct (2:6); (6) False vs. True Clarity (2:9); (7) False vs. True Concord (4:20).

Notice

As is typical in my commentaries, they are filled with many quotes from scholars. This is done to provide perspectives from a multitude of studies on the meaning of words, phrases, and concepts. Plus, some readers may have a limited range of personal research in biblical studies, so this helps readers see the theological terrain from the standpoints of national and international scholars over many, many years of studies. It is hoped that this notice at the beginning of this commentary will prepare readers for the voluminous resources which will be seen and encountered throughout its pages, and will thereby enrich their own studies.

I John
Scripture in a Structural Format

- I WORD OF LIFE (1:1-4)
 - A. Personal Witness to the Word (1:1)
 - B. Proclamation of the Word (1:2-3)
 - C. Purpose of Writing (1:4)
- II WALKING IN THE LIGHT (1:5-2:14)
 - A. Partners with God and Brothers (1:5-7a)
 - B. Propitiation for Sins (1:7b-2:2)
 - C. Paths of Obedience (2:3-6)
 - D. Practice - Not Profession (2:7-11)
 - E. Partitioning within the Family (2:12-14)
- III WARNING (2:15-29)
 - A. Practices of the World (2:15-17)
 - B. Persons of Woe (2:18-26)
 - C. Place of Safety: in Christ (2:27-29)
- IV WONDER OF LOVE (3:1-24)
 - A. Profile of Children of God (3:1-2)
 - B. Purity of Children of God (3:3)
 - C. Practice of Sin and/or Righteousness (3:4-10)
 - D. Parallels: Love & Life - Hate & Death (3:11-24)
- V WEIGHING THE CLAIMS (4:1-6)
 - A. Problem: Pneumatics/False-Prophets (4:1)
 - B. Perspective on Jesus (4:2-3)
 - C. Popularity with the World (4:4-6)
- VI WORTHWHILE ACTION (4:7-5:5)
 - A. Producer of Love (4:7-10)
 - B. Power of Love (4:11-18)
 - C. Practice of Love (4:19-5:4)
 - D. Progress of Love (5:5)
- VII WITNESSES TO LIFE (5:6-12)
 - A. Particulars: Water and Blood (5:6)
 - B. Pneuma: Spirit (5:7-8)
 - C. Pater: Father (5:9-12)
- VIII WRITTEN TO KNOW (5:13-20)
 - A. Possession of Eternal Life (5:13)
 - B. Prayers are Effective (5:14-17)
 - C. Power of Jesus (5:18)
 - D. Promise of God (5:19)
 - E. Person of Jesus Christ (5:20)
- IX WATCH OUT FOR IDOLS (5:21)

I John A Commentary

Even though these contrasts (p. 2) do not serve as the structural format of this letter, it is important to keep these in mind as the exposition of scripture unfolds. Again, there are seven of these major contrasts in this letter: (1) Light vs. Darkness (1:5-2:11); (2) The Father vs. the World (2:12-17); (3) Christ vs. Antichrist (2:18-28); (4) Good works vs. Evil works (2:29-3:24); (5) Truth vs. Error (4:1-6); (6) Pure love vs. Hypocritical love (4:7-21); (7) Believers vs. Non-Believers (5:1-21). These are not purely separate from one another, since some degree of cross-over clearly involves one contrast with others. But they do assist in keeping the overall design of concepts ever before the readers.

I WORD OF LIFE (1:1-4)

A. Personal Witness to the Word (1:1)

V. 1: “What was from [the] beginning, what we have heard (and still hear), what we have seen (and still see) with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, with reference to the Word of life”

The word “what” or “that which” (*ho*) is in the neuter gender (vs. masculine – if primary emphasis was to a person) and indicates that the author is referring to “the Christian message which was incarnated in Jesus” (Marshall. 101). Neuter pronouns cover a broader range of interests. That is, they “function comprehensively to cover the person, the words, and the works . . . the whole career of Jesus” (Brown, 154). So, the neuter pronoun does not minimize the person involved but rather magnifies the entire range or parameters in which the person functioned. As Burge (53) amplifies:

John is saying that the whole sweep of Jesus’ life bears importance to his subjects, not simply particular events or even the abstract appearance of God in history. In Christ, God walked with humankind, and anyone who had contact with that reality, anyone who had heard, seen, and touched that reality, could never make it less than pivotal.

Before John notes the particular senses (heard, seen, beheld, touched) involved in the encounters, he pinpoints strictly “the pre-existence” (Delling, 482) of the One Who will later be identified as the giver of “life.” By this avoidance of the article before the word “beginning” (*arches*), which would have referred to a point in time, John highlights “the eternal purpose of God” (Robertson, 204) before time began. That is, it denotes “character, according to man’s apprehension, rather than a definite fact or point of time” (Brooke, 2). This in itself would have been mindboggling to those who magnified the significance of sensory perceptions. So, John’s initial thrust was designed to startle the gnostics and stimu-

late his readers with the reality of truths which were timeless in origin but which God chose to reveal within the context of time and sensory perceptions. The sensory perceptions, of course, are what validated the appearance of timeless realities within the parameters of time. John mentions four of them. The first sensory perception (“we have heard”) is in the perfect tense which involves something which occurred in the past and the consequences of that past occurrence are still valid in the present. As one of the senses which is part of the human makeup, the eternal, timeless truths of God are experienced in time through the mechanism of *hearing*. John is speaking “for himself and his fellow-apostles, the prime witnesses of the gospel. . . . a testimony to the reality of the incarnation [God in the flesh]” (Sawtelle, 5).

The second sensory perception (“we have seen”) is also in the perfect tense. The added phrase “with our eyes” serves to burst any bubble that such seeing was merely a mental illusion. It was truly a physical phenomenon through the sense of *seeing*. As David Smith (169) points out, “his readers might doubt it, since they belonged to a later generation and had never seen Jesus; but St. John had seen Him, and he assures them, with elaborate iteration, that it is no dream.”

The third sensory perception (“we beheld”) is in the aorist tense, a tense of point action or action of an event. Westcott (6) says it portrays a sense of “calm, intent, continuous contemplation,” and Brooke (4) suggests “to ‘behold’ intelligently, so as to grasp the meaning and significance of that which comes within our vision.” Sawtelle (5) says, “they examined him, contemplated him. Their eyes dwelt upon him. There was that in him which awakened rapt and admiring attention. Ross says it “suggests a steady and deliberate gazing upon” (135).

Thus, the verb here used implies something remarkable in his person.” It is as if John is saying, “we did not grasp all the wonder but only its skirts” (Smith, 170), but enough was contemplated to result in awe and admiration.

This word occurs also in 4:12, 14. [John uses this word in his gospel: 1:14, 32, 38; 4:35; 6:5; 8:10; 11:45; Paul uses this word only once: Ro. 15:24. Luke uses it in his gospel: 5:27; 7:24; 23:55, and in Acts: 1:11; 8:18; 21:27; 22:9].

This is the sense of *thinking and mental processing*.

The fourth sensory perception (“our hands handled”) is also in the aorist tense. This, obviously, is the sense of *touching*. It carries the idea of “groping in the dark” (Vaughan, 22). David Smith notes the word is “used of the fumbling of a blind man” (170). But as Ross exclaims, “now that the Eternal Logos has been manifested, we no longer fumble in the dark, feeling after God; in Christ we have grasped hold of Reality” (135).

This is the same word Jesus used in Lk. 24:39 to encourage His disciples to “touch” Him to verify the reality of His physical, post-resurrection body. This was another stab in the soul of those with gnostic tendencies to deny the actual coming of God to earth in the form of flesh and blood.

These various sensory perceptions are with reference to “the Word of the life.”

This is the Word which *is* life and which “reveals or gives life” to others (Brooke, 5). John is here speaking of his own personal experience with reference to the Word and to life: “his hearing of his words, his seeing with his own eyes his Messianic works, his contemplation of the Divinity which shown through both; his handling of the body of the risen Redeemer” (Plummer, 2). As Malcolm Tolbert (22) explains:

“*life* is the rich, meaningful, and full existence that flow from God and that is impossible apart from him. Life and love are closely associated in 1 John. To have life is to know one’s self loved by God and to love others. Possession of such life is an exciting and rewarding experience. It brings to an individual an awareness of who he is as a child of God. Life is not petty, meaningless, futile, or tragic. It is bound up with the life of God. It is a present possession, to be experienced and lived in this world. At the same time, it has a meaning that transcends the narrow confines of birth and death, of space and time, and of the ebb and flow of history.

This “life “ is “eternal life.” This is “not the by-product of some enlightenment or knowledge acquired mystically. Eternal life is historically anchored in what we may call *the scandal of particularity* unique to Christianity” (Burge, 54). The precise expression “eternal life” is here, 2:25; 3:15, 5:11, 13, 20. For a fuller developed essay on the meaning of “eternal life,” see my article *Eternal Life: Misunderstanding and Meaning* in my personal website: archive.org/details/@mandm313.

B. Proclamation of the Word (1:2-3)

V. 2: “and the life has been manifested and we have seen and are bearing witness and are declaring to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has been manifested to us”

The verb “has been manifested” (*ephanerothe*) is in the aorist tense and denotes a point of action in pinpointed time. It declares that “this Being, in his character of the Life, became visible, and in him are centered all the relations between God and man” (Plummer, *PC*, 2). The verb means “to make known what already exists” (Robertson, 205). It indicates “the making clear of what was hitherto unknown, whether intellectual or sensible” (Brooke, 6). Lenski (375) says it “includes the whole manifestation from the incarnation to the ascension but especially from the baptism until the ascension, the time when the apostles beheld his glory (John 1:14).” He writes so convincingly that this evidence is so profound and great that “it is not now necessary to cite the prophets” (Bengel, 783).

The verb “we have seen” (*heorakamen*) again underscores the fact that John’s

experience was no optical illusion or visual hallucination. John here uses the perfect tense to indicate that the previous sight of Him still lingers in a state of completion or fulfillment. It is a state which never ends.

The verb “we are bearing witness” (*marturomen*) is in the present tense and focuses on John’s present efforts in the writing of this letter. That is, here John is transforming his personal experience into powerful exposition or communication about his experience. That is, “the witness is simply to the nature and significance” (Strathmann, 498) of the One in Whom and from Whom this “life” originates and in Whom it is experienced. It is the communication of *truth*.

The added verb “we are declaring” (*apaggellomen*) is also in the present tense to stress that his continuous declaration of these truths is “not on the act of proclamation but on the historical reality of that to which he bears witness” (Marshall, 103).

Of course, that to which his declaring or bearing witness is directed, and of which it consists, is “eternal life.” Again, see my article about this on my website noted above for expansive perspectives on this vitally important expression. Suffice it here to say that it was “the personal manifestation of eternal life in the historical person of Jesus which was of crucial importance for the writer – and his readers” (Marshall, 104). As Brooke notes (7), “the true life of the Son was realized in union and communion with the Father. By means of the Incarnation it was manifested to men.”

Its relevance can never be overstated but may be underrated by negligence and inadequate understanding.

V. 3: “what we have seen and heard we also declare to you that you also may have partnership with us and indeed our partnership [is] with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ”

Whereas in v. 1, the “heard” precedes the “seen,” in this verse, a rotation occurs. If v. 2 is a parenthetical expression, then this verse is a “resumption” (Brooke, 6) or the point where John resumes writing “with a recapitulation of verse 1” (Marshall, 104). Indeed, Haupt notes that “for a resumption, which should be as short as possible, and yet as comprehensive as possible, the most general expressions are the most pertinent” (18). Thus, John here picks up where he left off in v. 1: “what we have seen.” No difference in meaning is affected by this rotation.

John inserts the words “to you” to emphasize that he is addressing his words of purpose to those who had not seen or heard, yet believed (cp. John 20:29).

The stated purpose (*hina*) consists of an “exact phrase found only in this Epistle in the N.T.” (Brooke, 8): “you may have fellowship” (*koinonian echete*).

The word *koinonian* means “partnership, joint participation in a common cause.” It denotes being “one in that communion of which the unity between the Father and the Son is the pattern and the basis” (Plummer, *PC*, 2).

This partnership “with the Father and the Son” does not exclude partnership with other Christians but, in fact, is part and parcel of it. This joint-participation enter-

prise encompasses a triangular network: (1) each individual Christian is a partner with the Father and the Son; (2) each individual Christian is, therefore, a partner with one another; (3) these joint-connections represent “the substance which binds the church together” (Burge, 55). The word will occur again in vv. 6 and 7.

C. Purpose of Writing (1:4)

V. 4: “And these things we are writing to you for the purpose that our joy may be being filled”

The plural “these things” denotes what is to follow and “strongly confirms” (Bengel, 783) *truths* vs. *mere traditions* or *teachings of gnostic orientations*. As to whether it refers to what he has just written or to what follows, Brooke indicates “the reference is most probably to the contents of the Epistle, ‘already present to the writer’s mind’” (9). Plummer, *PC*, 3) says it “covers the whole Epistle,” as do Haupt, 22; Huther, 281; Lucke, 108).

Sawtelle, however, maintains that “the expression ‘these things’ (*tauta*) is used two hundred and forty-five times in the New Testament, and always, with half a dozen exceptions, with reference to things preceding” (8-9).

Lenski (380) and Vaughan (25) say it refers to “the entire New Testament literature” – a somewhat strange slant to this writer.

The word “write” (*grapho*) occurs in the present tense (here, 2:1, 7, 8, 12, 13 [twice]) and the aorist or point action tense (2:14, 21, 26; 5:13).

His first stated purpose in writing this letter was in the previous verse. He now states another purpose in this verse: “that our joy may be being fulfilled.” He uses the word “our” to indicate that “his own joy would be incomplete unless shared by his readers” (Vaughan, 25; Ross, 138). [He will specify other reasons for writing in 2:1, 12-14; and 5:13].

Lucke (108-109) notes that this *joy* arises “out of communion with the Redeemer, and, through him, with God the Father, gives to the Christian that tranquility and serenity, which elevates him above all earthly pain and sorrow, even the misery of sin, and fills him with increasing joy on account of his salvation.”

The verb “being filled” is in the perfect tense and thereby “stresses the state of completion, remain full” (Robertson, 206). This verb denotes *joy* that is “perfected, brought to its full measure. . . . Joy is perfected because it is given by the fullness of salvation which is granted with the exaltation of Jesus” (Delling, 297-298). It springs forth for those who are in union with Christ and thereby with one another (Plummer, *PC*, 3).

In his *Epistles of St. John* (77), Plummer provides a summary of the essence of these first four verses: “There is a Being who has existed with God the Father from all eternity: He is the Father’s son: He is also the expression of the Father’s Nature and Will. He has been manifested in space and time; and of that manifestation I and others have had personal knowledge: by the united evidence of our senses we have been convinced of its reality. In

revealing to us the Divine Nature He becomes to us life, eternal life. With the declaration of all this in our hands as the Gospel, we come to you in this Epistle, that you may unite with us in our great possession, and that our joy in the Lord may be made complete.”

II WALKING IN THE LIGHT (1:5-2:14)

A. Partners with God and Brothers (1:5-7a)

V. 5: “And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all”

The word “message” (*aggelia*) occurs only one other time in the NT: 3:11. This refers to the Word of God which is neither “ecstasy, dogma, nor speculation. In the Word of God there breaks in the lordship of God. The apostolic word is the message of the risen Lord as *Kurios*” (Schniewind, 57). Schniewind (59) elaborates on the significance of these two occurrences in 1 John as follows:

euaggelizesthai, *euaggelion*, *aggelia* are synonyms. In 1:5 *aggelia* = *euaggelion*, the only point being that the Gospel and Epistles of John apparently avoid *euaggel-*. It is hard to see any reason for this. Perhaps it is to be explained by the fact that the conflict against a Gnosis which hoped for a coming messenger made it advisable not to use *euaggel-*. With *euaggelizesthai*, *euaggelion* there is primarily bound up expectation of the coming messenger with glad tidings. . . . In 1:5 it is the Word of Jesus that is meant, in 3:11 the preaching (*marturia*) which underlies the community (*arche*). The two coincide for the author. There is explicit statement in 1:5 (*akekoamen ap’ autou kai anaggellomen humin* [“which we heard from Him and announce to you”]), whereas in 3:11 there is no more than indication through the parallels in 2:7 f. and Jn. 13:34.

The message is here specified: “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.”

The word “light” (*phos*) occurs 5 other times in this letter: 1:7 (twice); 2:8, 9, 10. Ross (141) suggests that “the supreme idea suggested seems to be that of the *holiness* of God.” Sawtelle (10) concurs: “It represents God’s pervasiveness of being, his perfect luminousness of mind, and the bright gladness of his life; but, more particularly, the perfect holiness of his moral nature.” This light is in opposition to the darkness of the world – 1 John 2:16 [“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”]

Haupt (32) elaborates:

it means that in Him all goodness and all perfection dwell; there

is no good which is not in Him; He is the *pleroma* ["fullness"], out of the fullness of which we are receive. And this is the concrete and practical import of the word *theos phos*, that in Him is all perfection, all truth, blessedness, and holiness; and in such a sense in Him, that as the light everywhere diffuses around its own nature, so all that is good radiates from God."

The word "darkness" (*skotia*) is used "to describe moral and spiritual evil" (Ross, 141). It "means to live without the benefit of divine illumination and guidance and so to live in sin" (Marshall, 110). It also occurs in 2:8, 9, 11 (three times). "It is the principle which animates and governs the world [1 John 2:16: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"]" (Haupt, 32). [A similar word *skotos* for "darkness" is in v. 6.]

Sawtelle (10) indicates that these terms intensify John's depiction of God. The term is used "not as the symbol of ignorance, error, or misery merely, but more especially as the symbol of moral evil, sin. In God is no sin at all. Sin can have no part in him, either in a thought, or feeling, or deed, or in a way of fellowship or union with him. His nature repels all sin. He cannot countenance it, either in himself or others." This, among other things, is a stab into the heart of any gnostic leanings or ideations.

V. 6: "If we may say that we have partnership with Him and may continually walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth"

The word "if" (*ean*) is a third class conditional term which "presents a supposable condition" (Sawtelle, 10). This word introduces a clause ("if we may say") which is possible but not probable. This is the first of three false claims (v. 8, 10), and is similar in intent to "he who says" (2:4, 9).

The word "partnership" (*koinonian*) is commonly translated "fellowship" but since this latter term is too often used in reference to eating at church socials, the former term is here preferred and more accurately captures the meaning of it. It first occurred in v. 3 (twice) and will occur again in v. 7.

To have "partnership with Him" cannot coexist with the continual practice of living a lifestyle of darkness (i.e., moral and spiritual evil). These two concepts are such that one denies the other, regardless of verbal claims otherwise. In fact, partnership with darkness makes the practice of the truth impossible and constitutes "lying." The truth of God in practice issues into godliness. In actuality, "no amount of fair speech will make up for the want [lack] of such practical godliness" (Ross, 142).

V. 7a: "But if we may continually walk in the light as He is in the light we are having partnership with one another . . ."

The Christian alternative to walking in the habitual hallways of moral and spiri-

tual depravity and darkness is to “continually walk in the light” – i.e., “the conscious and sustained endeavor to live a life in conformity with the revelation of God, who is ‘light,’ especially as that revelation has been made finally and completely in Jesus Christ, the necessary condition of fellowship” (Brooke, 15) or partnership with God and brothers. Indeed, “the fellowship [partnership] of Christians with one another is based on fellowship [partnership] with God, and it is the active realisation of that fellowship [partnership] and the evidence of it” (Ross, 143).

As Haas notes, “the false teachers whose opinions he is quoting and refuting in these verses boasted of their fellowship and communion with God, but they neglected the fellowship with men. John wants to remind them that they cannot have fellowship with God unless they have fellowship with other Christians” (35). Marshall concurs that “persons who cut themselves off from fellowship with other Christians cannot have fellowship with God” (111-112).

B. Propitiation for Sins (1:7b-2:2)

V. 7b: “and the blood of Jesus His Son is cleansing us from all sin”

The present tense verb “is cleansing” (*katharizei*) indicates an ongoing process that takes sin’s stains away from us, “removes our sinful deeds whenever he has sinned; takes away, removes, causes to cease” (Haas, 35). It is not “has cleansed” as in the past but “is cleansing” as in the present. It is “a continual present fact in the life of the believer, whereby he is knit still more closely in fellowship with Christ” (Lias, 41). This word also appears in v. 9.

The magnitude of such cleansing borders on straining one’s comprehension level. After all, the word “sin” (*hamartias*) denotes “sin in all its forms and manifestations . . . not only of the pre-Christian period of a man’s life, but also those committed in the course of Christian life . . . sin in whatsoever form it may manifest itself” (Brooke, 16). Smith (172) calls it “every outbreak of the sinful principle.” As Vaughan (33) notes, “there is no limit to the efficacy of Christ’s sacrificial death when it is applied to the believer.”

The Good News of God does not end at the beginning of the Christian life but continues. After all, “salvation is not a state of sinlessness. The sin constantly flows in, the irruption ceases not, but the blood of Christ meets it and cleanses us from it, giving constant victory to constant appropriating faith” (Sawtelle, 11).

The cleansing which took place in the past is related to regeneration. The cleansing which takes place in the present is related to sanctification. It is the fact, emphasized here, of “the blood of Christ entering into our life as a new principle of life. There is absolutely no Christian sanctification imaginable which does not take place through the blood – that is, through the Redeemer’s power of life working its effects and ruling within us” (Haupt, 43).

The work of God which began in the past involves “the constant carrying on

of the work of Christ's blood upon [the Christian] – that is, in its cleansing from sin, from the corruption still clinging to the soul" (Ibid).

As Lias (40) affirms, "Christ's life, offered to God and accepted by Him as a perfect sacrifice, is communicated to our life as a daily fact." There is no sin which is exempt from this perfect and powerful sacrifice. Indeed, "the blood has such power because it is the blood of the Son of God, of Him who through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God (Heb. 9:14)" (Ross, 144). So, whatever degree of comprehension is attainable in this regard, it is enough to sense that God's sacrifice "for our sins is ever before us, and the amazing spectacle subdues our hearts, takes possession of them, and drives out every evil affection" (Smith, 172) – again and again and again.

V. 8: "If we may say that we do not have sin we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us"

The word "we" indicates that John is including himself in this conditional clause. Even after regeneration, the sinful nature is not annihilated but is in constant warfare with the spiritual nature. Any regenerated person who denies this ongoing conflict and warfare is deceiving him/herself. Indeed, "to think of ourselves as sinless is not merely to err or to be deceived, but to *lead ourselves astray*. We are wilfully blind to what is in us. The light is shining, but we are like a man who pulls down the blinds and sits in a self-made darkness" (Ross, 146). Even "if the ripest Christian says he has not an active sinning nature hidden as a root within him, from which guilt and pollution will arise, needing the cleansing blood of Jesus, that man does not know himself; he is deluded" (Sawtelle, 12).

Those who think and/or say that since their regeneration they "had no more sinful propensities, committed no more sinful acts" (Smith, 172) are avoiding the facts of life. The principle of sin as a remaining poison in the lives of redeemed ones which periodically reveals itself in concrete actions and attitudes is "truth." Anyone who denies this fact does not have the truth within him/her. "Grace is the medicine [for this remaining poison], but recovery is a protracted process" (Ibid). Indeed, the present tense verb, "we do not have sin" indicates that "the daily falls of those who are walking in the light are meant, not the sins committed in the days of darkness before conversion" (Plummer, 5). Brooke concurs: "Sin is the principle of which sinful acts are the several manifestations. So long as a Christian commits sins, sin is an active power working in him; and its power still remains after the [initial] forgiveness of sins. To deny this is to refuse to accept the teaching of experience" (17).

Never forget this most significant truth: "The closer we are to the light of God the more conscious we are of our uncleanness and unworthiness. . . . Mark the significance of 'in us.' Truth may be all around us, near us, and acknowledged, but when we claim sinlessness we show that it has not penetrated our souls" (Vaughan, 34). If His Word was "in us," we would not dare make a claim of sinlessness.

The potential despair and defeatism which may arise from this realization is now confronted in the next verse.

V. 9: “If we may keep on confessing our sins He is faithful and righteous that He may forgive us the sins and may cleanse us from all unrighteousness”

Rather than caving in with despair and despondency to this continually existing sinful nature, the continual practice of “confessing” or admitting those periodic manifestations of sinfulness not only results in the forgiveness of such sins but also that God may “cleanse” (*katharise*) us from all unrighteousness. In v. 7, this word was in the present tense to indicate an ongoing matter. Here it is in the aorist tense denoting cleansing at each point of confession. The verb “forgive” (*aphe*) is also in the aorist tense denoting forgiveness at each point or moment of confession.

The expression “all unrighteousness” “characterizes sin and sins: anything contradicting the divine norm of right” (Lenski, 394).

God’s faithfulness and righteousness is seen in that “he should not only forgive the confessed sins, but, what is more, take away the guilt, free us from the sins, justify us, so that we stand as innocent before him” (Sawtelle, 12).

So, rather than mere remorse or regretfulness alone, the remedy in repentance offers both “forgiveness and cleansing” in the blood of Jesus. [God] would be unrighteous if He broke His promise ratified by blood of Jesus. As David Smith (172) points out: “Peace is not got by denying our sinfulness and our sins, but by frankly confessing them and availing ourselves, continually and repeatedly, of the gracious remedy.”

V. 10: “If we may say that we have not sinned we make Him a liar and His word is not in us”

The verb “have not sinned” is in the perfect tense indicating that we have never been in a state or condition in which some sin occurred or transpired. Vs. 8, on the other hand, was in reference to the principle of sin, not to any specific act or occurrence of sinning. So, with regard to either the principle of sin or any sinful act, those who deny either are ignorant of God’s Word for He says that both are true.

To say that God’s Word “is not in us” “is to assert that the Gospel has never found a home in our hearts, that our character and conduct are not shaped by its power” (Vaughan, 35). The “word/Word” is referring to “the Christian message” (Marshall, 115). As Ross affirms, “the revelation which He has given us of Himself, and especially the revelation given in the Gospel of Christ, has never really entered into us and exercised any influence over us. The delusion against which John is here warning us would be impossible if we steeped our minds in Scripture” (147).

2:1: “Little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not commit a sinful act and if someone may commit a sinful act we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous”

The term denoting John’s passionate affection for his readers is a term which first appears here but also elsewhere in this letter: 2:12, 28; 3:7, 18, 4:4; 5:21 and always in the plural (*teknia*). Another similar plural (*tekna*) occurs in 3:1, 2, 10 (twice); 5:2. Another plural term (*paidia*) which carries the “same sense” (Marshall, 115) occurs in 2:14, 18. These affectionate terms indicate the status of God’s children “as one of blessed possession and hope, to which externality and legalism are wholly alien, and which is victory over the world and death” (Oepke, 654).

Smith (173) states that John “assumes this tone because he is about to address a warning to them, and he would fain take the sting out of it and disarm opposition.”

The verb “I am writing” (*grapho*) is in the present tense and refers to something which is in the process of being written.

The word “these things” (*tauta*) may refer to what he has just written in 1:8-10 or to “the contents of the whole Epistle” (Brooke, 23). Lias (51) states: “what I have written and what I am about to write.”

John seems keenly aware of how easy it would be for these gnostic opponents to twist what he is saying about the continuing presence of the principle of sin in the lives of the children of God and the forgiveness of sinful acts which may still occur in their lives. So, to clarify and/or build support against any misunderstanding of his writings, he solidly states that he does not want his readers to “commit a single sinful act.” He does not want them to be discouraged from running the race and pursuing the pathways of holiness before them; nor does he want them to regard sin in any flippant manner or let the ongoing forgiveness of sinful acts weaken their resolve toward responsible discipleship.

However, when children of God do succumb to the tugs of temptation and/or are caught off guard and commit sinful acts, there is a remedy which must never be ignored or mitigated. John is including himself in this remedy by his use of the word “we have” – another present tense verb indicating ongoing or continual activity as need arises.

After all, John is here talking about “the single act of sin, into which the believer may be carried against the true tenor of his life, as contrasted with the habitual state” (Westcott, 42).

In fact, “the need is felt by the whole Church, not because any of them might, but whenever any one does fall” (Brooke, 27). This remedy for all people actually resides in one Person alone: “Jesus Christ the righteous” Who is here designated as “an advocate with the Father.”

The term “advocate” (*parakleton*) is a term which is used exclusively by John: In his Gospel account: Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, it is used in reference to the Holy Spirit Who is God’s Advocate on earth in behalf of Christians. Here it is used of Jesus Christ as God’s Advocate in heaven in behalf of Christians.

The word is composed of two separate words: *para* (“alongside, with, in the presence of, near, beside” and *kleton* (“called”) – thus, “called alongside as an aide or counselor” (Burge, 85) for those who commit sinful acts. Indeed, Jesus is “the advocate at the bar of God in heaven who as the Righteous can intercede for sinners . . . The living Christ intercedes at the right hand of the Father. In intercession He places His incorruptible life at the service of His people (Hb. 7:25) . . . being the defender of those who confess Him at the judgment seat of the Father” (Behm, 812).

John further describes this Advocate as “righteous” – that is, the Only One Who “is qualified to plead our case and to enter the Father’s presence (Heb. 2:18)” (Robertson, 209). He is so qualified because the term is used “to describe the piety of Jesus in fulfilment of the will of God . . . the Doer of the will of God in the fullest sense” (Schrenk, 189).

Jeremias (707) notes that this term “is most probably the Messianic title” (cp. Acts 3:14; 7:53; 22:14). In other words, Jesus did not have any sins of His own for which He must suffer “but as one who is not contaminated by sin he is qualified to intercede for others – the righteous One who died on behalf of the unrighteous so that he might bring them to God (1 Pet. 3.18)” (Marshall, 117). So, this term indicates “that characteristic of the Lord which gives efficacy to His advocacy of man. . . . He is not an advocate who wishes to set aside the law but to carry it out and apply it” (Westcott, 43) in behalf of believers when they sin. As Bengel (786) notes, “His *righteousness* removes our *sin*: and it is not itself lessened because he is the Advocate for sinners: Isa. liii. 11, 12.”

Failure to not acknowledge this startling truth from God and appropriate His advocacy in our behalf is simply another way to make God “a liar” (v.10) because it indicates one’s lack of trust in God’s provisions for believers who sin.

2:2: “and He Himself is propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the whole world”

The word “Himself” (*autos*) is an intensive pronoun to “emphasize identity and for special attention” (Dana and Mantey, 129-130). This further point of peculiarity about this Advocate lies within Himself alone.

The noun “propitiation” (*hilasmos*) occurs in the NT only here and 4:10. Marshall says it is the “means of neutralizing and cancelling sin” (117). Buchsel (317-318) offers expansive meaning as follows: It is the means by which

sin is made ineffective. . . . the setting aside of sin as guilt against God. The overcoming of sin as guilt cannot be separated in fact from the overcoming of sin as transgression, which in John is lack of love. In this respect John can even say that he who is born of God cannot sin, 3:9, 6. He deduces this impossibility of sin in the regenerate from the fact that Jesus, who is sinless, is manifested for the putting away of sin (i.e., as *hilasmos*), 3:5. If Christians do

still sin – and to deny this is to sin against the truth, 1:8, 10 – this simply forces them to look again to Him who is the *hilasmos*. The line from 1:8, 10 leads directly to 2:2. But it is worth noting that neither in 2:2 nor 4:10 does he refer to the death of Christ. He simply speaks of the risen Lord (2:1, *pros ton patera*) and of the total mission of Jesus (4:10). The *hilasmos* is not one-sidedly linked with the single achievement of death, but with the total person and work of Jesus, of which His death is, of course, an indissoluble part, 5:6, cf. 3:16; 1:7. Jesus is our expiation as the One who has fulfilled the purpose of His sending, who has been kept in perfect love (3:17) and who is perfectly righteous, 2:2.

Williams and the NIV translate the word as “the atoning sacrifice for our sins”; TEV translates “the means by which sins are forgiven”; NEB translates “the remedy for the defilement of our sins”; NASB translates “the propitiation for our sins”; Barclay translates “the propitiating sacrifice for our sins”; and Beck “He has paid for our sins.”

However, to guard against any ideas of limitations for this Advocate-Propitiator, John almost rushes “to add that this divine remedy is **for the sins of the whole world** of men, not just for stumbling Christians” (Blaney, 362).

C. Paths of Obedience (2:3-6)

2:3: “and in this we know that we have come to know Him: if we may keep His commandments”

The words “in this” (*en touto*) occur elsewhere in this letter: 2:5; 3:16, 19, 24; 4:2; 5:2. Here their meaning is explained in the phrase, “if we may keep His commandments,” the meaning of which will be explained shortly.

Now, however, the phrase, “we know that we have come to know Him” merits explanation. The verb “we have come to know” is in the perfect tense and indicates that we are in a present state or condition of knowing Him – not just knowing about Him. The RSV translates this phrase, “we may be sure that we know him”; “we can be sure that we know Him” (Williams). The remarks of Brooke (30) capture the essence of its significance: “We learn to perceive more and more clearly that our knowledge is genuine through its abiding results in a growing willingness to obey.” As the next phrase clarifies, “obedience, not feeling is the test of perfect love” (Plummer, 91).

Blaney (363) notes that “this knowledge is related to the fellowship of 1:7, which is the result of partaking of life in Christ.” The thoughts here, of course, reflect John’s statements in his gospel narrative: “And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou has sent” (17:3).

Dodd (31) also echoes the same: “In the Fourth Gospel itself it is made perfectly plain that to know God is to experience His love in Christ, and to return that love in obedience (see John 14:15-24, etc.).”

Now to the phrase, “if we may keep His commandments.” This is not referring to the OT Ten Commandments but to “His word” (v. 5) in which is stored all the absolute truths of God; and “to keep on walking as He walked” (v. 6). This means that there is the active exertion of obedient efforts toward the “practice of His precepts” (Smith, 174).

This verb “keep” is in the present tense and indicates that “keeping God’s commandments is the pattern of life for the person who truly knows God” (Vaughan, 40). Again, it is the same meaning as “keeping His word” (v. 5) and “walking as He walked” (v. 6).

These commandments are God’s not man’s. All the commandments of God, though many – as indicated by the plural – are actually one in nature: “the moral expression of God’s nature of which eternal life is the experience and have a moral unity signified by [obedience to] **his word**” (Hoon, 230).

Hoon’s additional comments should not be marginalized: “Emotionalized religion without discipline becomes sentimental, and intellectualized religion becomes sterile. . . . Moral discipline is the path to Christian character” (Ibid.). Marriage is to be sealed in a love which involves undivided allegiance ‘till death do us part.’ So, “it is not too much to expect the professing Christian to love God with an undivided allegiance” (Blaney, 364) – of which obedience is the key hallmark.

2:4: “The one who is saying that ‘I have come to know Him’ and is not keeping His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in this [saying]”

One of the problems John was facing at the time of his writing, and in the larger Greek world, was that many people regarded God as an intellectual object worthy of pursuit. For people to say that they ‘knew God’ was basically void of any ethical or moral obligations whatsoever. Again, it was an intellectual endeavor at best.

John, on the other hand, “is determined to lay it down quite unmistakably and without compromise that the only way in which we can show that we know God is by obedience to him, and the only way we can show that we have union with Christ is by imitation of him. Intellectual effort and emotional experience are not neglected – far from it – but they must combine to issue in moral action” (Barclay, 43).

So, what one ‘says’ and what one ‘does’ must support each other. To simply ‘say’ that they know God is not sufficient by itself.

John is not talking about the *possibility* or even the *probability* that someone would say such to be the case. Rather, he is referring to what was actually or factually being said. The use of the perfect tense in “I have come to know Him” indicates the claim that they had already reached and were permanently

lodged in perfect or complete knowledge of Him. There was no room or need for additional growth and development in the knowledge of Him, let alone any need for moral action/s.

So, despite their claim, they were not keeping His commandments. They not only were 'lying' but were "liars" in terms of their character. Indeed, their very "moral condition is false; he is one who makes it his business to say what he must know to be untrue, and to lead others astray" (Lias, 68).

To be a "liar" is to be in such a state or condition "in which a man is not partaker of the truth" (Haupt, 69). That is, his "whole character is false" (Westcott, 47). Truth is not "an active principle working in a man and corresponds to the highest effort of man's whole nature" (Brooke, 31). As Plummer notes, such a one "must have lost the very power of recognizing truth" (21). Brooke states that "if light is seen and not followed, deterioration of character is the inevitable result" (31).

So, his "saying" does not consist of "truth."

2:5: "But whoever may keep on keeping His word, surely in this the love of God has been completed - in this that we know that we are in Him"

Here the present tense verb "keep on keeping His word" indicates the progressive pattern of one's obedient lifestyle as one who knows God and is in union with Him. It, indeed, reveals that one's love of God (i.e., one's love for God) is in a state or condition of completion (perfect tense of *teleioo*) or "an accomplished fact" (Plummer, PC, 21). This perfect tense verb is also used in 4:12, 17, 18. "Its use here does not mean that our love for God is made perfect in the sense of being flawless or all that it should be. Basically, the word means to bring a thing to its proper end, or to bring to fruition" (Vaughan, 41).

This is an echo of Jesus' words in John 14:15: "if you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (cp. vs. 23-24; 15:10).

The adverb "surely" (*alethos*) serves to reinforce or strengthen the reality of this truth. It may be translated "truly, in truth, actually, surely."

2:6: "The one who says he remains in Him ought to keep on walking in the same manner as that One Himself walked"

The two present tense verbs "the one who is *saying* he *remains* in Him" create an obligation ("ought" – *opheilei*) of "moral responsibility" (Haupt, 72; Lias, 73). This responsibility is manifested in another present tense verb: "keep on walking" – "a continuous performance, not a spasmodic spurt" (Robertson, 211).

This continuous moral responsibility is not left vague or dependent upon one's own imaginations or preferences. It is anchored in "as that One walked" – an aorist tense verb which sums up the lifestyle of Christ while He was on the earth. However, "the career of Jesus does not afford His brethren merely an external copy, but an interior compulsive and assimilative force" (Findlay, 151).

The demonstrative pronoun (*ekeinos*) is matched with the intensive pronoun (*autos*) to leave no doubt as to Whom reference is being made. This demonstrative pronoun occurs again in the following verses in reference to Christ as well: 3:3, 5, 7, 16; 4:17. John also uses it in his gospel narrative: 7:11; 9:12, 28; 19:21. So, while this “life of Christ is *given* to us, it is also to be *retained* by us, by a perpetual and conscious exercise of the will” (Lias, 72). In its most simple expression: “every member of the fellowship [of union with God in Christ] is to model his daily life after the life of Jesus” (McDowell, 200).

D. Practice - Not Profession (2:7-11)

2:7: “Beloved ones, I am not writing a new commandment to you but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning - the old commandment is the word which you heard”

The affectionate term “beloved ones” (*agapetoi*), denoting those who are the objects of God’s love, appears here and five other times in this letter: 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11.

To say that he is not writing a new commandment is so true. It is, in fact, the repetition of the old commandment about love, even in the OT. It “lay embedded in the Mosaic law . . . and is, at least in principle, as old as creation, for the law of love is written into the very structure of the world” (Vaughan, 44). Findlay (156) states, “It is *the* commandment of our Epistle.” Cp. John 15:12. It is a commandment which is still in force. “It was old, but not obsolete, ancient, but not antiquated” (Plummer, 40).

Its significance for this letter is unmistakable. “The real force of the expression is to heighten the contrast of the ‘newer’ [gnostic] teaching which placed knowledge higher than love” (Brooke, 35).

Reference to “the beginning” and to “the word which you heard” takes his readers back to their initial - and continuous - hearing of the gospel message and *love* being the essential core component of that message. That is, “they had *heard* this commandment, in the oral teaching which they had received, when they were first seeking the Lord” (Ross, 157). Thus, what John is now writing to them is not something which has been recently added to the gospel message. It was and is *sine qua non* (“something essential”) both then and now.

2:8: “On the other hand, a new commandment I am writing to you which is true in Him and in you because the darkness is in the process of passing away and the true light is already in the process of shining”

The word “on the other hand, yet” (*palin*) indicates that something unique is to be noted from another angle or perspective. In other words, the commandment of love now includes “the admission of Gentiles to the full privileges of Christianity on equal terms with the Jews. In Christ and in Christians the old command

had gained ‘new significance and fresh result’” (Brooke, 36).

The gnostic teaching had minimized, if not abrogated, the matter of love so that their emphasis on knowledge could be magnified. So, “in Him and in you” the principle and practice of love had been delivered from the darkness which had aborted its importance. Concerning such darkness, the present tense verb “is in the process of passing away” (*paragetai*) indicates its gradual but ultimate extinction. The darkness of “night does pass by even if slowly. See this verb in verse 17 of the world passing by like a procession” (Robertson, 212).

However, “the true light is [also] already in the process of shining.”

The truth is clear enough: “the new significance of the law of love in Christ and in Christians had a far wider application. The light of the true knowledge of God was already shining and dispelling the darkness of exclusiveness by the light of love” (Brooke, 36). The word “darkness” symbolizes “sin, ignorance, error, the absence of God, [and] stands for the old order. The true light is the light of God’s self-revelation, now embodied in Christ (cf. 1:5)” (Vaughan, 46). So, the Christian faith was also the “true” or “genuine” light in contrast to the gnostic heresies.

The word “true, genuine” (*alethinon*) occurs three other times in 5:20. Here it denotes what is “reliable, no false flicker” (Robertson, 212). There is nothing “counterfeit or spurious” (Vaughan, 47) about it.

2:9: “The one who says to be in the light and is in the process of hating his brother is in the darkness until now”

Although the darkness was already in the process of passing away, that process had not yet reached its termination point. The same is true regarding the light. It was “gaining ground but had not yet recognized the light” (Brooke, 37). In fact, the one who claims to be “in the light” and yet is in the process of hating his brother” thereby cancels his claims. John’s statements are in the form of absolutes. The opposite of ‘love’ is ‘hate’ and the opposite of ‘hate’ is ‘love.’ There is no wiggle room or space for negotiation on the basis of “ifs, ands, or buts.”

John’s severity is unrelenting: To hate a brother or sister in the church means one is ‘in the darkness’ and has been blinded (vv. 9, 11); to love them means that one is living ‘in the light’ (v. 10). Love becomes a genuine value only when it is tested, only when we must reach beyond ourselves and love someone we do not wish to love. This is the caliber of love John has in mind. (Burge, 101).

2:10: “The one who loves his brother remains in the light and is not an offence in him”

Quite simply, the one who is in the process of obeying God and copying Christ are in the process of serving God and man by love and thereby “remains” in the light. In fact, “nothing in him makes others stumble” (Findlay, 157).

The word “offence” (*skandalon*) is the Greek word from which we get the transliterated English word “scandal.” It refers to “a trap or an object that makes one trip. Metaphorically, it is something that causes one’s demise or downfall” (Burge, 102).

2:11: “But the one hating his brother is in the darkness and is walking in the darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes”

Again, John is a man of absolutes. “Love is active benevolence, and less than this is hatred, just as indifference to the Gospel-call amounts to rejection of it. The penalty of living in the darkness is not merely that one does not see, but that one goes blind” (Smith, 176).

The picture here is that of the groping by a blind man. “He is at the mercy of his circumstances. He cannot command himself. Such is the image of one who allows any unrepented sin, but particularly that of brotherly hatred, to lie upon his heart, plunging him into darkness” (Sawtelle, 20).

The contrasts John sets forth are alarming: light – darkness . . . love – hate . . . truth – falsehood. Light, love, and truth may not be so attractive to those who live in the domain of darkness, hate, and falsehood. But only light, love, and truth are “the stuff of eternity” (Blaney, 367).

Those who live in the domain of darkness, hate, and falsehood typify those gnostic “troublemakers who spread confusion in the church” (Wilder, 234). So, within the context of the unveiling or disclosures of truths in the Christian faith, darkness, hate, and falsehood “disqualifies a man for knowledge of God and communion with Him” (Hoon, 235).

E. Partitioning within the Family (2:12-14)

2:12: “I am writing to you children because the sins have been forgiven for the sake of His name”

The term “children” (*teknia*) means “all John’s readers” (Ross, 161; Burge, 111; Blaney, 368). It denotes “those whom God knows to be qualified to obtain the nature and dignity of his children; the family name for the entire family of God” (Thayer, 617). It indicates children with a spiritual kinship. The term first appeared in 2:1 (which see for comments), then 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21. All of his readers “have been forgiven for the same of His name.” John uses a perfect tense verb in “have been forgiven” to indicate a state or condition of completion – they have been forgiven and remain in a state or

condition of forgiveness of sins. This was made possible “for the sake of His name.” That is, the name of Christ and the authority to forgive sins which that name accomplished in His sacrifice for sins; “through the atoning work of Christ” (Blaney, 368).

2:13: “I am writing to you fathers because you have known Him from the beginning. I am writing to you young men because you have overcome the evil one”

John now unfolds two groups of people – older and younger - who equally have “their place in God’s household” (Burge, 112) but with diverse qualities or featured traits: (1) “fathers” and (2) “young men.”

The (1) “fathers” are, of course, the older group who are “ripe in knowledge” (Sawtelle, 22), having known Him longer and “have had long mature experience in the Christian life from the beginning, with the right kind of knowledge, the knowledge which means keeping His commandments and walked as He walked (vv. 3-6), and that knowledge has grown and deepened with the passing years” (Ross, 162). Having been freed from their sins, “they have been given a new consciousness of God’s intimate fatherhood over them” (Burge, 112).

Marshall (139) adds as follows:

The description of a group of older Christians as ‘fathers’ is unparalleled in the New Testament; when the word is not being used literally (e. g. Eph. 6:4), it refers to ancestors or older men who are now dead (e. g. 2 Pet. 3:4). We can, however, see its use as a title of respect to an older generation in Acts. 7:2; 22:1. Elsewhere such people are simply called ‘elders’ or ‘older men.’ It is possible that a group of church leaders is meant, but probably the writer is thinking simply of the mature Christian experience of older people. They know (literally, have come to know) the One who is from the beginning. This description repeats what was said of all Christians in 2:3f. Only the characterization ‘who is from the beginning’ is new, and it is not absolutely certain whether the reference is to God the Father or to Jesus, both of whom existed from eternity past. Since the Father is specifically mentioned in verse 14a, it is probable that we should see a reference to Jesus here, otherwise we are faced with an awkward repetition. Nobody doubted that the Father was from the beginning; it was more significant for John to stress the pre-existence of Jesus.

The (2) “young men” perhaps indicates lack of maturity but with a robust faith and “the strength that has been given them to overcome the evil one” (Ibid.) This verb “overcome” is in the perfect tense which, again, indicates a complete condition or state of victory over the evil one. They had done so “coming to a

knowledge that their sins are forgiven, and to a consciousness of union with God. The victory implies this knowledge and union” (Sawtelle, 22).

It is imperative to note that the evil one is overcome but “is not slain. He does not cease to tempt. His buffetings are often severely felt. But he is no longer owner or master. And how shall one continue his victory over Satan but by living always in the conscious acceptance of Christ” (Sawtelle, 22; Blaney, 368).

We ordinarily associate victory with strength, a feature of youth. Indeed, “the conquest of evil, here represented as the result of an active struggle with a personal foe is as characteristic of the earlier years of Christian endeavor as is the fuller knowledge gained through experience of its later years” (Brooke, 45).

So, the fathers needed the strength of the young men and the young men needed the guidance of the fathers. It is a spiritual kinship-relationship in which both are needed and both need each other. Instead of jealousy or resentment, both groups should respect and learn from each other. Indeed, “the Christian life has both the theoretical and the practical sides to it” (Blaney, 368).

2:14: “I have written to you little children because you have known the father I have written to you fathers because you have known Him from the beginning I have written to you young men because you are strong and the Word of God remains in you and you have overcome the evil one”

The switch from the present tense of “I am writing” (*grapho*) in vs. 12-13 to the aorist tense “I have written” (*egrapsa*) in this verse poses interpretation alternatives, of which only four are mentioned here: (1) The present tense refers to this epistle and the aorist refers to the Gospel of John (Ross, 162; Smith, 177; Plummer, 99); (2) There is a pause or interruption in the writing and when resumed, the aorist “turns back in thought to that part of the letter which he had already finished – 2:11” (Brooke, 41). (3) The present tense refers to what follows and the aorist tense to what precedes; (4) The present refers to John’s point of view as he is in the process of writing, and the aorist refers to his reader’s point of view as they read it (Lenski, 421; Brooke, 41; Burge, 111; Robertson, *WP*, 213, and *Grammar*, 845-846 – this is known as the epistolary aorist – Dana and Mantey, 198).

It seems almost impossible to come to a definitive conclusion; and whatever conclusion one may connect with, it must be held with humility.

There is a change of words in v. 12 from “children” (*teknia*) to “little children” (*paidia* – perhaps a more “affectionate address” [Thayer, 473], a “fatherly intimacy with those whom he addresses” [BAG, 609]). Plus, as the subsequent phrase changes from “you sins have been forgiven for the sake of the Name” (v. 12) to “you have known the Father” (v. 14), there is noted a “difference in ground for writing: the knowledge of Christ [“His Name” – v. 12] as the Word, active from the beginning of Creation, includes all that we can know,

and this knowledge is regarded in two different aspects corresponding to the two general ideas of forgiveness and Fatherhood” (Westcott, 61).

There is basically no change or difference with regard to “fathers” in the subsequent phrase.

With regard to “young men,” there is a slight remolding. Their strength is now stressed in connection with “the Word of God [which] remains in you” – “as the fountain of your strength, the source of all true knowledge and power” . . . This strength which is drawn from the Word is to go on conquering all the allurements of the world which the devil will employ” (Lenski, 422). Indeed, the word “overcome” is in the perfect tense which denotes a state or condition which remains in effect. Therefore, “they will conquer and remain conquerors, and the devil will not capture them with love for the world” (Ibid, 423) – the idea of which will be elaborated in the next verse.

III WARNING (2:15-29)

Despite the fact that his readers are forgiven, are in union with God and are joint-participants with Him in this world, are victorious over the evil one, and have the Word of God abiding in them, “they are not yet taken out of the world, are still surrounded with evil, and the remains of a lustful, covetous, proud nature, are still within them and are not yet away from the scene or danger of sin . . . There is still the law of the flesh warring against the law of the renewed mind. The new life is a plant in the midst of tares” (Sawtelle, 23-24). The warning in this section of scripture, therefore, is warranted.

A. Practices of the World (2:15-17)

2:15: “Stop/Do not go on loving the world, neither the things in the world. If someone may go on loving the world the love of the Father is not in him”

This verse opens with a prohibitive (*me*) present tense imperative mood verb which “demands the cessation of some act that is already in progress” (Dana and Mantey, 302). Here it means to “stop or do not go on loving the world.”

The word “world” (*kosmos*) is here used to denote “that segment of humanity, traditions, customs, things, and thought that belong to the ‘darkness,’ or that sphere of human existence that is alienated from God” (McDowell, 202). In the next verse, he will identify more precisely the particulars in which and by which this alienation from God is experienced.

Here, however, he raises the alarm that if someone’s life is dominated by continuous, loving pursuits of the attractions of the world which are in alienation from God, then the love of God the Father is not in him. Such a person does not love God and the love of God for such a one “can find no place in him. That place is already occupied [by the worldly attractions so that] the Father’s love is kept out” (Lenski, 425).

As Westcott (63) notes: “By the ‘love of the world, and of things of the world’

the sense of the personal relationship to God is lost. Of the man who is swayed by such a passion, it must be said that *the love of the Father is not in him* as an animating and inspiring power. . . There can be but one supreme object of moral devotion.” If love for finite things surpasses love for the Infinite One, then love for the Creator does not exist. Anything and anyone who is regarded as complete within itself represents a rival to God which cannot and will not be tolerated.

2:16: “Because all that [is] in the world, the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the boasting of the life is not from the Father but is from the world”

John now particularizes three components which may serve as objects of moral devotion and may be regarded as rivals to God, any one of which, and especially all three together, “cover the whole ground of worldliness, of the temptation to set up the creature as an end” (Westcott, 62). These three components are actually under the domain of two primary drives or directions: “desire” and “pride/boasting.”

The first primary drive or direction consists of two elements: (1) “**flesh**” and (2) “**eyes**.” These reveal “the desire for enjoyment, and the enjoyment of what is desired, but in such a way that the egoistic element is prominent” (Haupt, 101). Both of these focus on the physical domain or the material elements in the world, and indicate that one’s life is dominated by these two elements.

Lias (118), for example, points out that the word (1) *flesh* is “the corruptible principle which was introduced into the world by sin, inward, as opposed to outward temptations.” Burge suggests that “John has in mind any desire, any sinful interest, that draws us away from God or at least makes continuing fellowship with him impossible” (115).

The (2) “**eyes**” refer to outward temptations. As Lenski observes, this is when “the lustful eyes rove afar for sinful pleasure” (426). This is when “external objects have an exaggerated power over us. Now he desires all he sees that seems pleasant, and is discontented if he does not obtain it. Hence envy and malice on the one hand, luxury and riot on the other” (Lias, 118-119).

The second primary drive or direction consists of one element: (3) “**the pride or boasting of life**.” The word translated “life” (*bios* – cp. 3:17) indicates “property, possessions, goods for living,” the possession of which are held with a sense of pride and such pride carrying with it “contempt for others” (Haupt, 101-102). Why? Because one’s life is under the dominion of “the natural [verses spiritual] man and all of the good of the present external life: high position, money, honour” (Haupt, 102), possessions, influence, etc.

The term “pride/boasting” (*alazoneia*) means “arrogance.” It occurs in the NT only here and James 4:16. It depicts “pretentious ostentation as of a wandering mountebank [“anyone who tries to deceive people by tricks, stories and jokes; charlatan”] . . . *ostentatious pride in the possession of worldly resources*” (Plummer, 103). Indeed, John is referring to that “hollow arrogance which presumes

that it can decide and direct the course of life without God, determine what it will do, gain, achieve, enjoy” (Lenski, 426).

Plummer continues (104): “These three evil elements or tendencies ‘in the world’ are co-ordinate: no one of them includes the other two. The first two are wrongful desires of what is *not* possessed; the third is a wrongful behavior with regard to what *is* possessed. The first two may be the vices of a solitary; the third requires society. We can have sinful desires when we are alone; but we cannot be ostentatious without company.”

2:17: “and the world - even the desire for it - is in the process of passing away but the one who is in the process of doing the will of God remains into the eternity”

“The world” refers to the elements noted in v. 16. The words “the desire for it” refer, in “a more generalized sense” (Metzger, 710), to what “carries away the man who harbors it to share in its destruction” (Marshall, 146). Indeed, the present tense verb “is in the process of passing away” (*paragetai*) – first used in 2:8 - to indicate the process of ultimately “disappearing,” is used here to verify that “all such objects of desire must in the end prove unsatisfactory, because of their transitory character” (Brooke, 49). In other words, “that which turns away from light is on that account devoted to inevitable ruin” (Haupt, 106).

As Marshall notes (146-147), “many people are tempted to live for the moment, to conform to the way of life of a material world, and either to question the temporary character of material life or to hope that there will be no judgment. It is a natural tendency to make oneself comfortable here in the present real world rather than to deny oneself here in hope of a better life hereafter.”

The following extracts from Burge ring loudly as to the thrust of this passage, and, indeed, the entire epistle, as far as “contemporary significance” is concerned:

John believes that the world outside of Christ is a treacherous place that can do irreparable harm to believers. . . . We must be forthright that a *boundary* does exist between our lives in Christ and the life promoted in the world. Unfortunately, for many of us such preaching is difficult, if not embarrassing, because our lives are so utterly enmeshed with the world. And because we fail to warn believers in our churches about the character of the world, they become vulnerable to its influences. . . . How often do we defer leadership in the church to those who have been successful by worldly standards? Possessing wealth, having a successful business, wielding influence in the world – these things do not in themselves mean that one should have spiritual authority in the church. . . . When secular, worldly power forms the basis for Christian leadership, new demons have entered the church, and once more the church is vulnerable. . . . (121-123)

Wells also loudly bangs the cultural corruption of the world upon the church:

It is one of the defining marks of Our Time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather that he has become unimportant. He rests upon the world as inconsequentially as not to be noticed. He has lost his saliency for human life. Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may nonetheless consider him less interesting than television, his commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, his judgments no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and his truth less compelling than the advertisers' sweet fog of flattery and lies. (88)

But after all is said and done, only those who habitually practice doing the will of God are engaged in a process which alone results in permanence. As noted by Brooke (49): "In the mind of God, values are facts, and indestructible facts. Whatever has values in God's sight is safe for evermore; time and change cannot touch it." The words of Lias (122) are too bold and binding to bypass:

Our affections must not be set upon the perishable things of the world we see, but upon the doing of His will Who is invisible to the eyes of sense, and can be discerned by the eyes of faith alone. If we cast our lot with the world, we too shall pass away with it. If we choose a higher lot, there may be temporary inconvenience, but there will be eternal gain.

B. Persons of Woe (2:18-26)

2:18: "Little children it is a last hour and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen, whereby we know that it is a last hour"

The switch in terms from *teknia* (2:1, 12) to *paidia* (2:14) is due to his speaking to his readers from the standpoint of his "authority of age and experience, and not as dwelling on the thought of spiritual kinship" (Westcott, 68). This change in tenor seems primarily due to this section of scripture on the Warning (vs. 15-29) about the practices of the world (vs. 15-17) and now on the Persons of Woe (vs. 18-26) which make this Warning necessary.

The words "a last hour" (*eschate hora*) refer to "the epoch [period of time] of Christianity. . . no event in the world's history can ever equal the coming of Christ until He comes again" (Plummer, 106). Indeed, as Dodd (48) puts it, it refers to "the new order revealed in Christ."

John specifies what he means by "a last hour" in the closing words of this verse:

the appearance of many antichrists is how “we know that it is a last hour.” The word “antiChrist” (*antichristos*) occurs in the NT only in this verse, v. 22; 4:3; and 2 Jn. Vs. 22 of this chapter, and v. 7 of 2 John, are the only times in the NT where the article precedes this term: “the antichrist.” In v. 22, the term is defined as: “the one who denies the Father and the Son” [His deity]; in 2 John 7, the term is defined as: “those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh” [His humanity].

In this passage, John is painting the picture of the persons of woe who exactly deny both of these truths. The incipient or early gnostic teachings denied the deity of Christ and His humanity. This is the heresy which John is here attacking.

The word “heard” is an aorist tense verb referring to some point of action in time when the hearing occurred.

The word “is coming” is a present tense – not a future tense - verb denoting the existing appearance in time of such evil teachers/teachings. This is evidenced in the words, “even now many antichrists have arisen.” So, “wherever doctrines are taught that subvert the essential truths of the Gospel [the deity and humanity of Christ], there is “the Antichrist” (Dodd, 49). The Christ existed from all eternity but the Antichrist/s appeared in time.

Both are still in existence: Christ in heaven as the Advocate-Mediator; the antichrist/s on earth as His rivals or opponents. This appearance in time of the latter is defined by John as the way “we know that it is a last hour.” It happened then and continues to happen today; this has been the ongoing happening throughout the history of the Church. Such truth continues to be elaborated in the next verse.

2:19: “They went out from us but they were not from within us for if they were from within us they would have remained with us but in order that they might be made manifest that all are not from within us”

The origin of this false teaching is found not in outside sources “in the heathen world; they were apostate Christians” (Ross, 170) who “went out from us.” These false teachers apparently “believed sincerely in the beginning that they could advance the cause of Christ by importing the gnostic philosophy into Christian ranks and adapting it to Christian doctrine. But when they were opposed by the stalwart church leaders, John and others, and found themselves out of place in the Christian fellowship, they deserted the church” (McCowell, 204). Brooke’s observations (53) are worthy of echo:

The false teachers had ceased to belong to the community to which they had formerly attached themselves – of the manner of their going forth, or of the exact causes which led to it, we are ignorant. . . The test of true discipleship was to ‘abide’ in the truth, as made known by those who had seen the Lord and been taught by Him. [However] external membership was no proof of inward union. The servering of the

connection showed that such membership had never been anything but external – outward fellowship as distinguished from inward communion.

2:20: “and you have an anointing from the holy one and you all know”

The word “an anointing” (*chrisma*) appears in the NT only here and twice in v. 27 (“the anointing”). Since this Christian community was being “assaulted by antichrists, it can resist only in the power of the Spirit [“the holy one”]. The use of this term means ‘anointing oil,’ implies that the community is anointed with the Spirit, this being the basis of the fact that it belongs to Christ” (Grundmann, 572).

As Plummer (110) weaves it, “just as the Antichrist has his representatives, so the Anointed One, the Christ, has His. All Christians in a secondary sense are what Christ is in a unique and primary sense, the Lord’s anointed.”

Furthermore, this demonstrates “how strongly in John the understanding of the Messiah is determined by the anointing of the Spirit and how the relation between the Son and sons, which is based on reception of the Spirit, finds an echo in the connection between the anointed One and the anointed” (Grundmann, 572).

The words “you all know [the truth]” indicates that all of them “have knowledge enough for what I, John, am now writing about” (Lenski, 436). This anointing “imparts to the community its comprehensive knowledge which confers on it the clarity of faith and judgment and the assurance of life and decision that come from its relationship to God” (Grundman, 572). In other words, John wants “to awaken his readers to their deepest convictions and counts on the widespread insight of the laymen of the church as a bulwark in a perilous situation. He also is insisting that the knowledge is not reserved to a few” (Wilder, 246).

2:21: “I have not written to you because you do not know the truth but because you know it and that every lie is not from within the truth”

John assuredly acknowledges that his readers knew enough to know who is an antichrist. Indeed, they all knew that every lie about his deity and humanity is not in accordance with the truth. He is urging them to use all the truthful knowledge they presently possess to detect, deflect, and destroy “every lie” which is the opposite of truth.

To be more specific, “the prophets of Antichrist recoiled not from a crucified Messiah, but from a *humanized God*” (Findlay, 319). As Hoon carefully couches it:

They could perhaps accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ; they could not accept Jesus of Nazareth as ‘God’ (4:15). They might believe in the Godlikeness of Christ; they could not believe in the Christlikeness of God. This is still the ultimate issue. So much

in our modern world strikes at the thought of a Christlike God: the brutality and savagery of human life in history; the incalculable dimensions of the physical universe science has revealed that stagger the mind and chill the heart; the fashionable belief in God as eternal beauty or reasons, as cosmic energy, as absolute being or divine oversoul – modern equivalents of first-century Gnostic abstractions; the affront to reason offered by the Cross, that God could suffer such shame; the affront to reason and taste offered by the Incarnation, that God could be born in a stable; the shock to reason, that in one event in history God has disclosed himself as he has nowhere else.

2:22: “Who is the liar if not the one denying that Jesus is the Christ This is the antichrist the one denying the Father and the Son”

The words “the liar” (*ho pseustes*) first appeared in 1:10; 2:4; and occurs again in 4:20 and 5:10. [The word “lie” [*pseudos*] occurs in 2:21, 27.] John does not mence with words or become squeamish in characterizing someone who denies that Jesus is the Christ. After all, one who does so is without question from a scriptural standpoint the ultimate “liar” par excellence. After all, “apart from Jesus we have no secure knowledge of God; to deny him is at the same time to lose all grip of God” (Barclay, 68). This denial “when grasped in its full significance – intellectual, moral, spiritual – includes all falsehood: it reduces all knowledge of necessity to a knowledge of phenomena: it takes away the highest ideal of sacrifice: it destroys the connexion of God and man” (Westcott, 75). “The liar” and “the antichrist” are now presented as synonymous terms. They are inseparable. Since Jesus, as the Son of God, is the revelation or manifestation of the Father, and the only way to the Father (Mt. 11:27; John 14:6), then to deny either and/or both of these is to deny the other. In connection with v. 18, there have been many antichrists throughout history who have denied the reality of the Incarnation (God coming in the flesh). So, from John’s standpoint, “the antichrist is the spirit of perverse hostility to God that pervades every age. It expresses itself in many people and movements. If we reject [Jesus], our whole perspective will be distorted and erroneous. Once we start at the wrong place, we can never be anything but wrong anywhere along the way” (Tolbert, 59-60).

2:23: “Every one denying the Son has neither the Father the one who confesses the Son has the Father also”

This verse amplifies the previous verse. “To confess the Son is to receive the Divine life of the Father. For to confess the Son is to realise what He is, namely, the impartor of the Divine light and life, the medium whereby all that is in the

Father is given to the world. And he who acknowledges this, opens his soul to all the fullness of Divine Being which is given to the Son” (Lias, 159-160). The denial of one is the denial of the other. After all, “the Father is manifested and interpreted in the Son” (Smith, 181),

2:24: “What you have heard from beginning let it remain in you If what you have heard from beginning may remain in you you also will remain in the Son and in the Father”

In contrast to what his readers have recently heard from these false teachers, they are to let what they heard originally about the Son and the Father be the anchor to which and upon which they place their confidence and conduct. In other words, “do not be carried away by the new-fangled Gnostic teaching” (Robertson, 218). The repetition of “what you have heard from the beginning” and “let it remain” and “may remain” indicates that the original teachings are worth their salt. It is not enough to simply receive sound teachings at the outset and then subsequently abandon them. They must continue to build upon them, to bind themselves to them. Failure to “not let what we received remain in us is fatal” (Lenski, 439).

2:25: “And this is the promise which He promised to us the eternal life”

After all, this pursuit of the original teachings is linked to God’s promise which is here identified as “eternal life.” The word “promise” (*epaggelia*) occurs here only in this letter. This promise from the Father is fulfilled in the Son. There “can be no promise to compare with this – that we should share the eternal life, the life of God” (Plummer, *PC*, 28). This eternal life “is not simply the duration of being which starts at death but a quality of life begun on earth and extending through eternity. Because it is indeed the very life of God it is necessarily indestructible” (Vaughan, 68). In fact, it is “another way of describing our abiding ‘in the Son and in the Father’” (Wilder, 249). For an expanded look at the meaning of this expression, see my website: archive.org/details/@mandm313 and the article “Eternal Life: Misunderstanding and Meaning.”

2:26: “These things I have written to you concerning those who are deceiving you “

These words of warning about the practices of the world and the persons of woe are designed “to rescue the sheep from the wolves” (Robertson, 218). The false teachings of the antichrists will only lead them astray (*planonton* – which first appeared in 1:8 and will occur again in 3:7). The word means “to mislead, to deceive”; “to cause someone to wander from the right way” (BAG, 671); “try to seduce you” (Bengel, 794); “to lead astray” (Williams, Beck); “to lead away from the truth; to be led into error and sin” (Thayer, 514).

C. Place of Safety: in Christ (2:27-29)

2:27: “and for you, the anointing which you received from Him remains in you and you have no need that someone may teach you but as the anointing of Him is teaching us about all things and is true and is not a lie and just as He taught us you must abide in Him”

The word “anointing” (*chrisma*) occurs for the second time (v. 20), again, in reference to “the role of the Holy Spirit as teacher in the battle against heresy, which endowed them with the capacity to distinguish between truth and the lie invented by the heretics concerning Christ” (McDowell, 205). The expression “you have no need that someone may teach you” means in regard to adding anything new or different from the original teachings they had heard and received. This does not mean that “we have no need of any other man’s assistance to understand . . . Each of us serves as a ‘supplying-joint’ (see Eph. 4:16) to his brother in the things of God” (Lias, 169). This is why there are so many (21) different spiritual gifts by which we receive and benefit from others in the body of Christ. No one knows it all, or has it all, and is so sufficiently supplied that the need of others is aborted. After all, John himself, as a man, is teaching them, but that does not place him in competition with the Holy Spirit. Rather, it places him in conjunction with or partnership with the Holy Spirit.

It seems a hard truth for some to realize that “no one possesses in himself the capacity of independently arriving at truth, and as long as he is encompassed with the infirmity of mortal flesh, will need the assistance of his brethren to exhort, quicken, warn him in his task” (Lias, 170).

Again, there is no need for someone to teach you anything new or different, but you must “remain firm in that direct divine fellowship [with the Holy Spirit and one another] established by the teaching which you are constantly receiving and which at first you received” (Westcott, 79). To veer from such is to veer from God and one another.

So, the reference to what is “true” involves both “intelligent understanding as well as emotional attachment” (Blaney, 373). Indeed, “the experience of eternal life [v. 25] means growth in truth as well as possession of truth” (Hoon, 250). And as Brooke (61) notes: “As truth is appropriated, their fellowship with the Divine grows and becomes more real.” Again, to veer from such is to veer from God and one another.

2:28: “and now children you must remain in Him that if He may appear we may have confidence and may not shrink back from Him in His presence”

John, again, uses his affection expression for his readers: “children” (*teknia*) as he urges them to “keep on remaining/abiding in Him” (Present tense, im-

perative verb). The reason is clear enough: “confidence in His presence” which “means especially the fearless trust with which the faithful soul meets God” (Plummer, 117). As Dodd (65) notes:

At any moment the shame of denial may cause us to shrink from Him; at any moment, remaining in Him, we may have confidence in His presence. The Last Judgment, in all its solemnity and decisiveness, waits upon us in the midst of time. Nevertheless, our experience in time has an end . . . Death places us in the immediate presence of the Lord, for it sets us beyond time. It would be a pity if we should then **shrink from Him in shame**.

2:29: “If you may know that He is righteous you know also that every one practicing righteousness is born from within Him”

Now, John makes a smooth transition from the future to the present. That is, “from the mention of the *future* manifestation of the Son and the sons of God, he draws a new discussion on sin and righteousness” (Bengel, 795). The first “know” (*eidete*) indicates “intuitive or absolute knowledge” and the second “know” (*ginoskete*) indicates “experiential knowledge” (Robertson, 219). That is, the second word means “to come to know, learn to know” (Thayer, 118), or “to realise” (Lenski, 445).

Since Jesus is “righteous” (2:1), then we must “*learn to see* also that none is a child of God who does not practice righteousness” (Ibid). Indeed, it is the consistent practice of righteousness which provides “proof of the new birth” (Robertson, 219). This practice of righteousness is the same as the practice of truth in 1:6.

To be “born of Him/from within Him” indicates that any product of righteousness is traceable back to Him as the source of its flow. Indeed, “the only way in which a man can prove that he is abiding in Christ is by the righteousness of his life. The profession a man makes will always be proved or disproved by his practice” (Barclay, 72).

IV WONDER OF LOVE (3:1-24)

A. Profile of Children of God (3:1-2)

3:1: “Observe how great a love the Father has given to us that we may be called children of God and we are! Because of this the world does not know us because it did not know Him”

The word “observe” (*idete*), commonly translated “behold” (KJV) or “see” (NAS, Williams, Beck) or “Think” (TCNT) is an aorist imperative verb which calls attention to an astounding, astonishing fact: “the wonder of the present status of

believers as God's beloved sons" (Marshall, 169).

The word "love" (*agapan*) indicates the sacrificial, undeserved, unmerited flavor of love which is "foreign to this world: other-worldly" (Smith, 182). According to Nygren, it is "the center of Christianity" (47); "universal and all embracing (63); "spontaneous and unmotivated; indifferent to value; creative, and the Initiator of fellowship with God" (75f.); and "completely revolutionary" (81).

It is, therefore, no wonder John designates it "how great" (*potapen*). It indicates that God's love is "so unusual, to unearthly, so unique to our experience, that we barely expect its result: 'we are children of God'" (Burge, 145).

Haupt (153) says it "never serves to indicate merely external greatness but always that which is internal." Blaney (376) remarks that "it refers to the quality of God's love, the fact that it is given to those who are both unlovely and unworthy. . . . The wonder of this love is more than that it is a manifestation of God's grace; the wonder is that it has been given to man." It is the wonder of "how great a love the Father has given to us" in "both quality and quantity: 'what glorious, sublime love' [Luther]. To see it aright is to sink down in adoration before it. It is beyond all comprehension" (Lenski, 449).

Smith (182) exclaimed: "What unearthly love?"

The verb "given" (*dedoken*) is in the perfect tense which indicates a state or condition of completed action. This love is irreversible, in other words.

The verb "called" (*klethomen*) is another aorist tense expressing punctiliar action (i.e., a point in time in which the action occurred or took place). It states the fact of actually being called "children of God." The passive voice in this verb means that "we" were the recipients of this call which was done by none other than the Father Himself. This is the same "Father" who was mentioned in 1:2, 3, 2:1, 13, 15, 16, 22, 23, 24; and will be used again in 4:14; 5:7.

The added words "and we are" (*kai esmen*) indicates that this "is no mere empty title. It is a realized fact, though some [seemingly] are in danger of forgetting it" (Brooke, 81). Wilder (254) suggests that this expression was likely used by the false teachers, though "falsely claimed for themselves." John adds another expression of superlative importance: Because of this other-worldly love from the Father which called us to be His children, "the world does not know us because it did not know Him."

"The world" refers to those who are not "children of God." The first word "know" (*ginoskei*) is in the present tense and denotes that the world apart from God does not "presently recognize" us. As Sawtelle (35) points out: "Since we are children of God by a new nature, raised into a new sphere of life, endowed with the principles and attributes of a new race, clothed with traits and privileges appropriate to this higher relation – for this cause the world does not know us."

This truth is so because it "did not historically recognize Him." This second occurrence of the word "know" is in the aorist tense and, as just noted, refers to that point in time in history of never knowing or recognizing Him as "Father."

This “world” of people of never knew God and “has only fictional, false conceptions regarding our Father and regarding us, his children” (Lenski, 451).

3:2: “Beloved ones now we are children of God and it has not yet been manifested what we shall be we know that if He may appear we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is”

For the second time (2:7), John uses the affectionate expression “beloved ones” (*agapetoi*) to denote those who are the objects of God’s love. Of course, this is only sensible since he is setting forth a profile of “children of God.” The word “now” (*nun*) is emphatic and offers some degree of repose until the “not yet” (*oupo*) is replaced with another “now.” So, the word “now” and the present tense verb “we are” (*esmen* - for the second time: v.1) “children of God” (for the second time also: v. 1) *combine* to leave no question of doubt as to whose we presently are. Again, the world without God does not recognize or comprehend that Christians are more than they appear.

But although the full manifestation has not yet occurred, it will eventually. Until then, the lack of manifestation of “what we shall be” is plain enough:

not yet has God made a public display of the glory that belongs to his children, of the inheritance incorruptible, unstained, unfading, reserved for us in heaven (1 Pet. 1:4). Not yet do we wear the white robes of heaven; not yet does the crow of glory sparkle on our brow. The robe of Christ’s righteousness, our crown of hope, the diamond of faith, the pearls of love, are invisible to physical eyes. We still wrestle with the flesh; in a sinful world and with a mortal nature we plod on wearily. A child of God is here and now, indeed, like a diamond that is crystal white within but is still uncut and shows no brilliant flashes from reflecting facets (Lenski, 451-452).

But at some point, it will be “manifested what we shall be.” There is no uncertainty or lack of assurance that a marvelous manifestation is forthcoming. In fact, “our being already God’s children is the guaranty of the fullest perfection. What God sees inwardly shall as plainly be seen outwardly. What the divine childhood involves must be evolved; the latent must become patent” (Sawtelle, 35).

So, “if now we have a glimpse of what it means to have the presence of the Father within us, when Christ comes there will be yet more overwhelming experiences for us. He will appear, we will appear just like him, and then we will see him exactly as he is” (Burge, 146-147).

B. Purity of Children of God (3:3)

3:3: “and every one who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as that one is pure”

The word “everyone, all” (*pas*) indicate that “purity” is for one and all, not for any special class or group of people who attain a higher plane or level of “knowledge” above and beyond the rest.

The word “hope” (*elpida*) speaks of confidence or assurance because it is an attitude, a disposition, a look that is placed or deposited “in Him.” This is the only time or place “in which John speaks of the Christian hope” (Westcott, 100) in this letter. He uses the verb form (*elpizo*) of this word, however, in his gospel narrative (5:45).

With regard to “everyone” who properly places this hope in Him, a marvelous transaction occurs: “he purifies himself.” This is a present tense verb which indicates ongoing activity and pursuits. This tense “makes it clear that moral purity is not achieved in one ecstatic experience in this life. It is not accomplished by a single response to an altar call. The effort to realize fully the possibilities inherent in our relation to God as his children lasts throughout all the days of our lives” (Tollbert, 70).

This is “the duty which our destiny imposes. It denotes purity maintained with effort and fearfulness amid defilements and allurements” (Smith, 183).

It involves “shrinking from contaminations, of a deliberate sensibility to pollution of any kind. This comes as a result of inward effort and in virtue of his divine destination (Heb. 10:10) to which he is gradually conformed, in virtue of earthly, human discipline” (Westcott, 101).

Marshall’s words (174) demand repetition:

The importance of this section as a whole is that it draws attention to the reality and the incompleteness of Christian experience. Christians who are in doubt about their standing need to be reassured that those who do what is right have been born of God and belong to him. They have all the privileges of God’s children. At the same time, however, they need to be warned against any self-satisfaction or feeling that they have achieved all that is possible in Christian experience. To think in this way is to ignore the dimension of hope. It is to suggest that God has already done all that he can do, and that he has no further moves open to him. Worse still, it is to acquiesce in the present sorry state of the world and of ourselves, the situation in which the true light is shining but only in the midst of darkness. We have to be reminded of the hope of a future consummation and encouraged to live in the light of that great event.

Christ (“that one”) is called “pure” “in virtue of the perfection of his humanity”

(Westcott, 101). It is interesting that God the Father is never called “pure.” God the Son, however, is so called “because of His human experience” (Smith, 183). Indeed, “the model of the purity is complete” (Sawtelle, 36). To constantly and confidently pursue Him is the only pathway to this purity for every child of God. This is an urgent perspective which Paul also presented in Romans 8:29: “out destiny is to be conformed to the image of God in Christ” (Robertson, 221).

C. Practice of Sin and/or Righteousness (3:4-10)

3:4: “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness and sin is lawlessness”

The consistent and habitual practice of sin involves consistent, conscious and habitual disregard for God, His will, and His ways as delineated in scripture, directed by the Holy Spirit’s leadership, and depicted in harmonious living with others – all in the light of God’s moral pattern of righteousness. Therefore, “since sin is the contradiction both of the character and will of God as expressed in Christ, we cannot take it lightly. Not only is God righteous; he also demands righteousness [2:29]. The failure to be righteous, therefore, is *lawlessness*. It is a rebellious flaunting of the purpose of God for his creatures and of the divine order for the universe” (Tolbert, 71). So, everyone whose lifestyle is that of constantly or habitually practicing “sin” (*harmatia*) or disobedience to the law of God as seen in acts and attitudes of *love*.

More precisely, John now highlights and identifies “the gravity of sin or sinful acts with **lawlessness**” (Wilder, 257). The word “lawlessness” (*anomia*) is composed of the word for “law” (*nomos*) with the letter “a” prefixed; this is known as an alpha private which negates the meaning of the word to which it is attached. The word means “no law” or “without law” – that is, anarchy.

The practice of sinful acts and attitudes is a perversion or violation of the moral code by which order is sustained and maintained. Indeed, “sin is anarchy because it is the sinner’s expression of his willful determination to live according to the laws of his own choosing in disregard of the laws of the universal moral order” (McDowell, 208) – “a criminal in the eyes of God” (Sawtelle, 36).

Bengel (796) observes that “a crooked line is seen of itself; but it is more conspicuous when compared with the ruler.” By way of analogy, Christ was the embodiment of God in the flesh. “Hence every failure to reach the pure spirit of Christ [3:3] may be known as the transgression of the law” (Sawtelle, 36).

3:5: “and you know that one was manifested in order that He may bear the sins and in Him is no sin”

So revolting, repulsive, and revulsive to God is the nature of sin and its naughty manifestations, that He Himself was manifested in the flesh to “bear” or “take up

and take away” (*are*) sins “completely” (Robertson, 222) in the sacrifice of Himself in behalf of sinners on the cross. This is an echo of the meaning of the word “propitiation” or “expiation” (*hilasmos*) in 2:2: “the means by which sins are forgiven.” He alone could do this because He alone is the One in Whom neither the principle of sin nor the practice of sin is found.

3:6: “Every one who is remaining in Him does not practice sin; every one who practices sinning has not seen Him or known Him”

In order to stress his perspective on this matter of practicing sin or righteousness, John declares bluntly - with the present tense verb “remains” - that no one who consciously and continuously conducts his/her life in a manner that is “in intimate relation with Christ” (Burge, 149) or circulates his/her in a manner that is in conscious communion with Christ will, at the same time, consciously, deliberately, and with disregard for God keep on practicing sin.

John’s twofold verdict in this regard is couched in two perfect tense verbs which indicate an existing state or condition of reality: (1) such ones have not “seen Him” as the Visible One [Son] who reveals the Invisible One [Father]; or (2) “known Him” in an intimate union or communion.

The habitual, arrogant, disregard for God, and the assertion of one’s own right to live and do as he/she pleases is practicing sin and this in itself “is proof that one has not the spiritual vision or the spiritual knowledge of Christ” (Robertson, 222). This is in total contrast with “purifying himself” (3:3).

A pattern or lifestyle of deliberate and intentional rejecting of the ways to which God has called one is to be “sinning in spite of knowledge and conscience; and therefore conduct which can be explained only by a love of sin, conduct which shows that the man will not abandon and renounce sin” (Ebrard, 222). The selfish and satisfying spirit of sinning is to thwart the will of God, to be in the enjoyable process of turning away from God. But to habitually turn from God only leads to being thwarted by God.

As Plummer (*PC*, 72) observes: “The fact of the man’s sinning proves that his perception and knowledge have been imperfect, if not superficial, or even imaginary; just as the fact of Christians leaving the Church proves that they never were really members of it (ch. ii. 19).”

To cut to the chase, “sin is not in the believer the ruling principle, as it is in the case of the defiant, persistent sinner” (Ross, 183).

3:7: “Children let no one deceive you the one practicing righteousness is righteous just as that one is righteous”

For the fourth time (2:1, 12, 28), John uses the affectionate term of address “children” (*teknia*). This is due to “the peril of the situation” (Westcott, 105). And for the third (1:8, 26) and final time, he uses the term “deceive” (*planato*) and issues an imperative call for action. No matter how appealing or persuasive the false teachings may be, do not let them captivate you with enticing

words and lead you away from the original teachings you heard. By using the present tense again – “the one who is in the process of practicing righteousness is righteous” – John’s point is unmistakable. A righteous person pursues, although without perfection, the pathways of righteous living. His aim and desire is to carry out and fulfill God’s order for moral rectitude. However, throughout history, there have always been false teachers, like these gnostics, who endeavored “to reconcile religion with moral laxity . . . that conduct was immaterial to the spiritual man, for no external acts could defile such” (Plummer, *PC*, 72). John, therefore, here rebuts such deception and delusions. Christ Himself was righteous and He Himself only produced righteousness in His words and ways. The same is and should be true for righteous Christians.

3:8: “the one who practices sin is from the devil because the devil practices sin from the beginning for this the son of God was manifested that He may destroy the works of the devil”

On the other hand, again using the present tense, John declares that “the one who is in the process of practicing sinfulness” thereby reveals him/herself to be in league with “the devil.”

The process of practicing sin is to obey the devil and disobey God; it is the failure to abide or remain in conscious communion with Christ and thereby keep on purifying oneself. As Barclay notes (77), “so long as we remember the continual presence of Jesus, we will not sin; it is when we forget that presence that we sin.”

The original sinner was, indeed, the devil himself, and he has never ceased from sinning. Sin “made its beginning in him” (Haupt, 186). Sin continues its destructive course through those who support the devil’s mission.

To practice sin is also to function in a way that is contrary to the manifestation of the Son of God’s purpose in coming to the earth: “that He may destroy the works of the devil.”

The actual word used here for “destroy” (*luo*) means “to undo whatever the devil had achieved, to thwart whatever he tries to do. No doubt it is his ‘work’ of temptation and enslaving men that is in view” (Marshall, 185). How does this destruction of the devil’s works take place? By what John “has already said in terms of personal forgiveness, cleansing, and being brought into fellowship with God. This can occur gloriously in the life of the individual now. . . . it will take place in its totality at some future time, though as yet the works of the devil are plentiful and visible” (Blaney, 379). Until that ultimate and final destruction occurs, however, Jesus continues to destroy the works of the devil by “taking away sins, so that they are not committed any more (v. 9)” (Buchsel, 336).

3:9: “every one who is born from within God does not practice sin because His seed remains in him and he cannot keep on practicing sin because he has

been born of God”

Indeed, those who are born into the family of God become additional opponents, with Jesus, of the devil and are actively engaged in resisting the practice of sin. This resistance is made possible because God’s seed has become the principle of life by which *the born again one* now views and conducts his attitudes and actions.

John is here using “the metaphor of a seed planted in the heart which produces new life, just as in Jesus’ parable of the sower the seed planted in receptive soil is the Word of God which ‘grows’ into eternal life” (Marshall, 186). As Alexander Ross (185) phrases it:

The germ of the new life has been implanted in the soul of the child of God and it grows, is certain to grow – a gradual process and subject to declensions from time to time, but it assuredly grows from more to more. The incorruptible seed of the Word of God, implanted in the soul by the Holy Spirit, has brought to the soul the new life of the children of God (1 Pet. 1:23). The man to whom that has happened cannot live habitually in sin, though there may be lapses into acts of sin, he cannot revel in sin, because he has been born of God and remains a child of God. He can say with Paul: ‘It is not I (the real ‘I’, in whom the seed of God abides) who do the deed, but sin that dwells within me’ (Rom. 7:17, Moffatt), for sin is still there in his soul, though not now dominant.

In the words of David Smith (185): “The believer’s lapses into sin are like the mischances of the weather which hinder the seed’s growth. The growth of a living seed may be checked temporarily; if there be no growth, there is no life. . . [But] He cannot keep sinning, as the seed cannot cease growing.”

3:10: “In this is manifest the children of God and the children of the devil: everyone not practicing righteousness is not from within God and the one not loving his brother”

The words “in this” (*en touto*) are referring to what follows in terms of factual evidence as to what it is that reveals or manifests people to be either a child of God or the devil. It is a “very plain, short rule” (Sawtelle, 40).

There are no exceptions to this plain and short rule.

In fact, the rule is obvious to see: John “narrows it down to one special form of righteousness which is in fact the basis of the whole, and in the exercise of which the false teachers had apparently shown themselves particularly lacking – “the one not loving his brother.”

Despite claims of superior knowledge and special privileges which their

adherents were offered, “their claims of intellectual and spiritual superiority” (Brooke, 91) were deemed worthless because of their lack of loving other Christians.

As Tolbert (72-73) notes: “No man is righteous who does not have right relations with his fellows. According to the Christian gospel, righteousness in human relations is not just seeing that everybody gets his due. It is a life of love that seeks to see that all men get more than their due, even as God has given us more than we deserve.”

D. Parallels: Love & Life - Hate & Death (3:11-24)

3:11: “because this is the message which you have heard from the beginning that we may love one another”

The word “message” (*aggelia*) occurs here for the second time (1:5) in this letter.

The word “beginning” (*arches*) occurs here for the ninth (1:2; 2:7 (twice), 13, 14, 24 (twice); 3:8) and final time in this letter. Here it refers to the beginning of their Christian life and the message of love for one another. So, this is no *new* message.

While the message is that of brotherly love, it is not the usual word for brotherly love (*philadelphia*). Rather, it is sacrificial love (*agapomen*) which the Christian brothers are to have for one another in the highest sense of the word.

This is the first occurrence in this letter of the phrase, “to love one another.” It occurs again in 3:23; 4:7, 11, 12, and each time uses this same word for “love” (*agapoo*). In 2:10; 3:10, 14; 4:20 he says, “love one’s brother” but means the same thing as “one another.”

This, of course, reflects the teachings of Jesus in Jn. 13:34-35, and 15:12, where the same word for love (*agapoo*) is used. This indicates that this teaching is the essence of the Christian faith.

3:12: “not as Cain he was of the evil one and slew his brother on account of what? because his works were evil but the works of his brother righteous”

John now underscores his pitch on the quality of love by contrasting it with two OT characters. Even then, it was a religious matter. Cain proved that he was in league with the evil one by his actions against his brother: he killed him. His “hatred of righteousness led him to the violent murder of his brother. The violent deed was only the last expression of that antipathy which righteousness always calls out in those who make evil the guiding principle of their life” (Brooke, 92).

Marshall (190) suggests that “he saw that righteous acts won God’s approval, and he was angry that this was so.”

3:13: “and do not marvel brethren if the world hates you”

Just as Cain was inspired by and acted in accordance with the evil one, even so the world of non-Christians “hates” Christians which is also in accordance with or a manifestation of the evil one. This is something which should not cause a Christian to “marvel” (*thaumazete*) over, however. In fact, this present imperative verb demands that a Christian should “stop marvelling over” or should “cease wondering” (Robertson, 224) about such hatred. It is normal. “Hatred of those who love God is natural in those outside the family of God” (McDowell, 211).

3:14: “we know that we have passed out of death into life because we may go on loving the brethren; the one who is not in the ongoing process of loving is the one who goes on remaining in the realm of death”

John is so convinced of the truthfulness of what he is writing that he unhesitatingly declares that “love for one another/love for the brethren” is not only a measuring stick by which one’s salvation is tested, but also the superlative “criteria by which an individual may judge as to whether or not he is a child of God” (McDowell, 211). Those who love the brethren thereby reveal that they have “passed out of death into life” – the verb “passed” being a perfect tense which indicates an existing and permanent state of being or irreversible condition - and those who have not experienced this ‘passage’ still reside in the realm of death.

John’s opening verb “we know” (*hemeis oikamen*) is also in the perfect tense which leaves no room for doubt or disputation about what he is writing.

3:15: “every one who practices hating his brother is a murderer and you know that every murderer does not have eternal life abiding in him”

The one, like Cain, who practices hating his brother not only thereby reveals that he does not have eternal life, but also that he is, in fact, a murderer. Of profound importance is the fact that this word translated “murderer” (*anthropoktonos*) occurs only one other time in the NT: John 8:44 where it describes the character of the devil.

This, of course, focuses on one’s motive, and “he who has murder in his heart cannot at the same time be the possessor of eternal life” (Blaney, 381). This is so, “even though he may never commit the overt act” (Vaughan, 83).

In other words, this verse “echoes the severe exhortation found in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount that our inner motives and attitudes weigh as seriously as our actions in God’s moral economy” (Burge, 161).

3:16: “in this we know love because that one laid down His life in behalf of us

and we ought to lay down the life in behalf of the brethren”

John uses the expression “in this” (*en touto*) to set the stage for the supreme revelation of God’s loving action in behalf of Christians: “that one laid down His life in our behalf.” The word “laid down” (*etheken*) means to “lay aside, give up” or “divesting oneself of something” (Burge, 162). Indeed, in contrast to the negative example of hate in Cain, the positive example of love in Jesus is now set forth. Even though the name “Jesus” is not used, John uses the word “that one” (*ekeinos*) in reference in him in 2:6; 3:3, 5, 7, 16; 4:17.

But it also sets the stage for the supreme revelation of loving action which Christians are to show in behalf of other Christians. That is, “Christ’s model of self-sacrifice *ought* to inspire us to levels of giving” (Burge, 162) – even “self-sacrifice to the uttermost on behalf of others” (Ross, 190). As White is quoted as saying, “John scorns mere talk about loving and demands the deeds and truth of love as evidence of spiritual life” (Blaney, 381).

Thus, the relationship between love and self-sacrificial suffering is clearly portrayed in Christ and the necessity of such in the life of believers.

3:17: “but one who has the goods of the world and may see his brother having need and closes the affections of his heart from him – how does the love of God remain in him?”

There are at least two ways of interpreting this verse: (1) even if one does not have to make the supreme sacrifice in giving up one’s life in behalf of another, he may do so by attending to the needs of seeing a brother in need and responding to meet that need; (2) the supreme manner in which the giving up of one’s life in behalf of a brother in need is to precisely meet that need: self-sacrificial love = meeting needs, a form of metaphorical death to oneself. However, both ideas may actually merge, or at least are capable of being merged into one. After all, His self-sacrificial love consisted of a death which denoted the authentic giving of His life to meet the needs of others. The following comments may cement this potential understanding.

The word translated “goods” (*bios*) occurred earlier in 2:16 where it is most commonly translated “life” (KJV, NASB, Williams). Beck, however, translates it “property,” which, perhaps, captures more accurately the meaning John is seeking to convey both here and 2:16. Indeed, other equally acceptable translations of the word are: “livelihood, possessions.”

So, whatever possessions we may have to meet the needs of another, if one refuses to use them in a particular case by turning his back away from someone in need, it is likely that the love of God has found no love in his heart.

3:18: “Children, let us not love in word neither in the tongue but in deed and in truth”

The word “children” (*teknia*) occurs for the fifth time (2:1, 12, 28; 3:7) to keep the tender tone before his readers.

Once again, as a verb, the superlative, sacrificial kind of “love” (*agapomen*) occurs for the eighth time (2:10, 15 (twice), 3:10, 22, 14 (twice).

It is important to note the presence of the article (*te* – “the”) before the word “tongue.” The article “marks the tongue as the special instrument of the hypocritical love” (Plummer, *Epistle*, 133). As he continues to explain: “it is to profess an affection which one does not feel, which is sheer hypocrisy; it is opposed, not to deeds, but to *truth*. It may show itself also in hypocritical acts, done not with the wish to do good, but to win praise, or to injure others” (134). The words “in truth” stand in contrast with “in word.” Blaney (382-383) says, “Deeds are always necessary, while verbal expressions of love can be dispensed with.” After all, truth is “the inward actuality of love” (Haupt, 215).

Plummer, *PC*, 75) notes: “People say kind things which they mean at the moment, but afterwards they do not take the trouble to act kindly. But to love *with the tongue* only is far worse. This is to say kind things which one does not mean, and which one knows to be unreal. Deeds are needed to complete the kind word; truth is needed to correct the insincere tongue.”

John is not condemning “kind words which are comforting and cheering, but warm words should be accompanied by warm deeds real . . . actions do speak louder than words” (Robertson, 226).

3:19: “and we shall know in this that we are of the truth and shall persuade our heart in the presence of Him”

The word translated “we shall know” (*gnosometha*) “denotes a knowledge that is experiential. ‘We shall come to know’ or ‘get to know’ or ‘ascertain’ is the idea” (Vaughan, 86).

The words “in this” (*en touto*) mean “by loving in deed and truth, we shall know that we are of the Truth, that we are the children of God of Truth, not the children of the devil, who is the Father of lies” (Ross, 191).

The word “shall persuade” (*peisomen*) is “co-ordinate with ‘shall know,’ and springing out of the same condition of love” (Sawtelle, 43). It is a term denoting assurance, but “this assurance is possible only if we know that we are of the truth. That is to say, this statement follows the former one as a logical consequence” (Vaughan, 86).

The word “heart” (*kardian*) refers to “the conscience which is assured, and which condemns” (Bengel, 799).

3:20: “that if the heart may condemn us God is greater than our heart and he knows all things.

The word “condemn” (*katagionoske*) occurs only three times in the NT: here, v. 21; Gal. 2:11. “It means to know something against one, to condemn”

(Robertson, 226).

If or when this occurs, relief and comforting encouragement are needed. Of course, when “our failures in duty and service rise up before us” (Smith, 187), our heart condemns us. But this is not the end of the sentence. After all, “the worst that is in us is known to God, and still He cares for us and desires us. Our [personal] discovery has been an open secret to Him all along” (Ibid.). This personal discovery of what God has known all along should not “frighten us or discourage us . . . Our heart condemns us often, as our black sin rises up before us, but, by the grace of God, we have also in our heart love revealed in deeds, and that is something to encourage us” (Ross, 191-192).

Since God “knows all things,” “the full grasp of God’s love for us silences the condemnation of our own hearts, for His love is a love that knows all and still loves, a love that gave the highest for us (Jn. 3:16) and that cannot be made to cease loving us (Rom. 3:31-39)” (Ross, 192).

Barclay observes: “The perfect knowledge which belongs to God, and to God alone, is not our terror but our hope” (87).

Bengel (799) quotes this words of Martin Luther: “Though conscience weigh us down, and tell us God is angry, yet God is greater than our heart. The conscience is but one drop; the reconciled God is an ocean of consolation.”

Jesus! Why dost Thou love me so?
What hast Thou seen in me
To make my happiness so great
So dear a joy to Thee?

Wert Thou not God, I then might think
Thou hadst no eye to read
The badness of that selfish heart
For which Thine own did bleed.

But Thou art God and knowest all;
Dear Lord, Thou knowest me,
And yet Thy knowledge hinders not
Thy love’s sweet liberty.

3:21 “Beloved, if the heart may not condemn us, we have assurance with God”

The affectionate term “beloved” (*agapetos*) occurs for the third time (2:7; 3:2) to remind them of their being objects of God’s love.

In fact and actuality, “if we can set our hearts at rest by remembering that God is greater than our hearts and knows everything, then our hearts will no longer condemn us, and we shall be able to approach God with boldness” (Marshall, 199).

The fact then that our heart may not condemn us is “not a claim to sinlessness,

but the consciousness of fellowship in God's presence" (Robertson, 227). The heart is "pacified in the presence of God" (Sawtelle, 44).

The word "boldness" (*parresian*) means "confidence, assurance," and occurs here for the second time (2:28); and will occur again in 4:17; 5:14. It is this "blessed state of mind [that] should mean closer communion" (Ross, 193) with God.

3:22: "and if whatever we may ask we receive from Him because we are keeping His commandments and doing the things that are acceptable in His eyes"

"Every true prayer is the expression of the desire to obey and to do the will in those matters with which the request is concerned. We may compare the noble Jewish saying, 'Do His Will as if it were thine, that He may do thy will as if it were His' (Brooke, 102). In the words of Ross (193): "Children who come so confidently to their Heavenly Father cannot ask anything that He will refuse."

Here, John specifies two duties which reveal harmony with God: (1) obedience and (2) service. After all, (1) "true obedience to the Will of God must become spontaneous before it is made perfect" (Ibid.). Indeed, "an obedient life is an expression of harmony with God and is not likely to ask for something which is contrary to the will of God" (Vaughan, 88). (2) "practicing regularly the things which are pleasing in his sight" (Robertson, 227), especially "brotherly love as seen in meeting the needs of others."

3:23: "and this is His commandment that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and we may keep on loving one another just as He gave commandment to us"

The commandments (v. 22 - plural) are now crystallized in one single commandment: belief and sacrificial (*agapomen*) brotherly love.

This command of sacrificial brotherly love is rooted in "belief in Christ with its outward growth in brotherly love; for so are they viewed as one by the writer, and called one commandment" (Sawtelle, 44) – an inseparable unity of belief and love.

This belief involves commitment to and "trust in the One who is the object of Christian confession" (Marshall, 201). The present tense of the word "keep on loving" indicates an ongoing, perpetual process of growth and development. Belief or faith "is the first essential, for without faith there can be no right doing" (Ross, 194). This faith, however, reveals itself in need-meeting love, without which faith is false and non-existent.

3:24: "and the one keeping His commandments remains in Him and He in him and in this we know that He remains in us by the Spirit Whom He gave

to us”

The person whose life is chronically characterized by dogged pursuit of His commandments is one who thereby manifests that he is presently abiding or remaining in union with Him. This abiding, ongoing union with God is made possible “by or through the Holy Spirit Whom God gave to us.”

Our Christian walk is not only a matter of doctrinal orthodoxy or ethical purity, but is also mystical and spiritual. John says that Jesus Christ will live in us and that the vehicle for this indwelling is the Holy Spirit. Assurance does not spring simply from vigorous works of obedience or orthodoxy, but from the interior life. We know that Christ lives in us *by the Spirit he gave us* (cf. 4:13). . . . The Spirit is not an insignificant array of feelings, but ushers a concrete presence and reality into our lives.

As Hoon (271) points out: “A Christian may not be able to define his belief logically in terms of thought, or be able to argue cogently against doubt, but if his belief issues in works of love, it is real: and in his heart he knows it. When he loves he knows he is **of the truth** and his heart is reassured by even if his intellect is troubled.”

This is the first mention of the Holy Spirit in this letter. “It is a kind of transition to the discussion respecting the Holy Spirit, which follows immediately in the beginning of ch. iv [vs. 1, 2, 3, 6, 13; 5:6, 7, 8]. It is given to us *by the Spirit*, and it is the Spirit which is given” (Bengel, 800).

Indeed, the presence of the Holy Spirit is not only evidence that one belongs to God but also signals His work in “guiding believers to distinguish between true and false teachings” (McDowell, 212).

V WEIGHING THE CLAIMS (4:1-6)

A. Problem: Pneumatics/False-Prophets (4:1)

4:1: “Beloved stop/do not go on believing every spirit but test the spirits if it is of God because many false prophets have gone out into the world”

The word “beloved” (*agapetoi*) occurs for the fourth time as an indication of their being the objects of God’s love, and will occur again in this chapter (7, 11). Since some of John’s readers were being carried away by the gnostic teachers and their erroneous teachings, John uses a present tense imperative verb in calling them to “stop believing every spirit.”

He also uses the present tense when it comes to “keep on testing” (*dokimazete*) the truth or truthfulness of what they are hearing. The word means “examine,

interpret, discern, discover, prove” the utterances to determine if it squares or conflicts with their original hearing. Vaughan (93) suggests the test is for “authenticity” [which] “does not contradict the teaching of Christ and His Apostles” (Plummer, *Epistle*, 95).

The word “spirit” (*pneumati*) is used here in the sense of “utterances from either God or God’s adversary, so it is the duty of all to test such utterances” (Lias, 288) to know their origin or source.

As Robertson (229) puts it, “credulity means gullibility and some believers fall easy victims to the latest fads in spiritualistic humbuggery [false pretense, imposter, sham, deception].”

The reason for such testing is “because many false prophets have gone out into the world” with their claims “to be instruments of the Holy Spirit but who were in fact spokesmen and instruments of an evil spirit” (Vaughan, 94). They were earlier (2:18ff., cp. 3:10) identified as “many antichrists.”

These “false prophets,” of course, were the mouthpieces of spewing spiritual sewage and needed to be stopped.” “These spirits mysteriously find affinity with primal impulses of evil in human personality, and are able to possess and use men as their mouthpieces” (Hoon, 271).

B. Perspective on Jesus (4:2-3)

4:2: “in this you know the Spirit of God every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God”

The *sine qua non* (“something essential”), essence, core, heartbeat of the Christian is found in this verse. Since the revelation of the essence of God’s character or nature was in the bodily presence of Jesus, to deny or ignore this truth run counter to this revelation or manifestation.

As Tolbert states it: “The Spirit of God does not lead, as the gnostic teachers claimed, to a denial of the significant role of Jesus in revelation. God’s Spirit leads to the opposite conviction. The words and deeds of Jesus are pivotal for the Christian understanding of what God is doing in the world. This is based on the belief that what God does in any generation is consistent with what he did in Jesus.”

To veer from this in any manner or method is to veer from God Himself.

4:3: “and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not from God and this is the spirit of the antichrist which you have heard is coming and now it is already in the world”

It is the attitude of these false prophets that their utterances were in opposition to the reality of God becoming flesh and blood in Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, Calvin (232) states that “as Christ is the object at which faith aims, so he is the stone at which all heretics stumble.”

The expression “the spirit of the antichrist” occurs again from its original mention in 2:18-23. Not only, John declares, had they heard that this counterfeit Christ was coming, but he declares that it is already here in these false teachings. In fact, “the opposing **spirit** refuses the confession, and being **not of God** is **of the antichrist**” (Wilder, *IB*, 274). The refusal of this confession, from a negative frame of mind, means that these false teachers could not do so because they were intent to separate “the divine from the human [and] divide the one divine-human Person” (Westcott, 142). This denial of the true union of God and man in One Man is a denial of “that which is characteristic of the Christian faith” (Ibid.).

C. Popularity with the World (4:4-6)

4:4: “you are from God children and have overcome them because greater is the one in you than the one in the world”

The word “you” (*humeis*) is in an emphatic position in the sentence to stress the contrast of these children of God from those who were not.

The popularity with the world was not so powerful that it prevented them from overcoming its allurements. The word “world” is practically synonymous with the false teachers or antichrists. In fact, the perfect tense of the verb “overcame” (*nenikekate*) denotes the abiding or continuing reality of victory over the world of false teachers in their initial conversion experience. So, what improvements are needed to top that? What additional features are to be gained by embracing the false teachers and their denial of that which you have already found to be true?

In fact, 2:13, 14 have already declared the “permanent victory” over the evil one by the use of the perfect tense there. So, its use here is another affirmation of that permanent victory. Calvin (234) notes that “we can no more be conquered than God himself, who has armed us with his own power to the end of the world.” In addition to the reality of victory, John now notes the reason for victory: the Spirit of God “is in you.” “Calm confidence” (Robertson, 230) is now the name of the game. And as John will point out in 5:5, it is also “a continuous victory because [it is] a continuous struggle” (Ibid.).

So, John is emphasizing “that which was central in doctrine and essential in experience in order to achieve that which was spiritual in content” (Blaney, 389).

4:5: “they are from the world therefore they speak things from the world and the world hears from them”

These false teachers are “from the world” in the sense that they derive their character, commission, and conduct from “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of property/possessions” (2:16). They are “in the power of the evil one” (5:19) and are the devil’s delegates. The world of evil ones

“listens to those who speak its own language” (Smith, 190). It never has been and never will be anything “new or unusual that the world, which is wholly fallacious, should readily harken to what is false” (Calvin, 235). The world of evil ones is readily known for applauding the attitudes, aspirations, and actions of other evil ones – as they reflect or represent an echo or etched image of themselves. As Jesus Himself remarked, the world loves its own (John 15: 19).

This reality, however, “is no excuse for making the message of the gospel dull, or for the rationalizing one’s inability to secure the attention of men. It is true that affinity with truth or error in men’s souls will incline them to listen or not listen; but the more inclined men are not to listen the more resourcefully and energetically the church must proclaim its truth” (Hoon, 277).

4:6: “we are from God: he who knows God hears from us; who is not from God does not hear from us; from this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit”

Another contrast: “they” (v. 5) – “we” (v. 6). “We” have our source or origin of life, truth, and victory “from God,” while “they” (the gnostics) have their source or origin of death, lies, and defeat from the evil one.

The one who “knows” or “continues in getting to know God better” (present tense) is the one who listens to and understands “the language of His messengers” (Smith, 190). Those who do not know God and have to desire to get to know God better do not hear from God’s messengers.

It is “from this” listening and obeying or not that the spirit of truth and of deceit are revealed and/or recognized. The key trait of truth is that it is associated with the Spirit of God. The key trait of deceit is that it is associated with the evil one, the false teachers, the antichrists.

VI WORTHWHILE ACTION (4:7-5:5)

A. Producer of Love (4:7-10)

4:7: “Beloved let us love one another because love is from God and every one who loves is born of God and knows God”

The affectionate “beloved” (*agapetoi*) occurs for the fifth time (2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1 – and will last appear in v. 11).

For the exhortation to “love one another,” see 3:11.

It appears that “the important point is that ‘loving’ is the test and criterion both of being ‘begotten of God’ and of ‘knowing God’” (Law, 398).

4:8: “the one who does not love does not know God because God is love”

Love, by its very nature, and “primarily under all circumstances is a reciprocal idea: it requires a loving subject and an object loved and what it imparts is something good” (Haupt, 257). A Lias (308) observes: “There can be no knowledge of God without love. . . . love is not a transient part of God’s dealings with man. It is a necessary part of the divine essence” (Lias, 308, 312). Therefore, as John here asserts, “not to have known love is not to have known God” (Plummer, *Epistle*, 100).

Vaughan adds: “to assert that ‘God is love’ is to say that love is of the very essence of God, that all His activity, therefore, is loving activity. If He creates, He creates in love; if He rules, He rules in love; if He judges, He judges in love. All that He does is the expression of His nature, which is to love.”

4:9: “By this the love of God has been manifested in us that God sent His only begotten Son into in order that we might live through Him”

The fact that “the love of God has been manifested in us” means “the love of God, which is now *in us*, throughout our spiritual experience” (Bengel, 801). This love “was made not esoterically but openly, in a human being, a person who could speak to persons as persons and be understood – God’s **only Son**” (McDowell, 217). The verb “sent” (*apestalken*) is in the perfect tense indicating a completed state of being; that is, He was sent and remains sent. the latter be a continued overflow from the former. He was sent with a mission and/or commission to carry out and He is still carrying out that mission through His body, the Church on earth, and in heaven as the Advocate (2:1) Who is constantly serving as the eternal High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-10:18).

The purpose “in order that” (*hina*) of His being “sent” was “that we may live through Him.” The word “through” (*dia*) “indicates mediation, he is the personal Mediator, the execution of his commission makes him the channel for bestowing spiritual, eternal life upon us” (Lenski, 502).

For a detailed exposition of this truth about His mediation as High Priest, see my commentary on Hebrews on my website: archive.org/details/@mandm313.

4:10: “In this is the love: not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as expiation concerning our sins”

The nature of the self-sacrificial, selfless giving of unconditional love, and its orientation is not with us; it did not spring from us; we did not initiate love to God. Rather, it came from within Him. This love originated in Him alone as its Sole Source and manifested itself supremely “as expiation for our sins.”

The word “expiation” (*hilasmon*) refers to “the means by which sins are forgiven.” This is the second occurrence of this word in this letter (2:2). The transfer of comments from 2:2 is copied below with minor adjustments: Marshall says it is the “means of neutralizing and cancelling sin” (117). Buchsel (317-318) offers expansive meaning as follows: It is the means by which

sin is made ineffective. . . . the setting aside of sin as guilt against God. The overcoming of sin as guilt cannot be separated in fact from the overcoming of sin as transgression, which in John is lack of love. In this respect John can even say that he who is born of God cannot sin, 3:9, 6. He deduces this impossibility of sin in the regenerate from the fact that Jesus, who is sinless, is manifested for the putting away of sin (i.e., as *hilasmos*), 3:5. If Christians do still sin – and to deny this is to sin against the truth, 1:8, 10 – this simply forces them to look again to Him who is the *hilasmos*. The line from 1:8, 10 leads directly to 2:2. But it is worth noting that neither in 2:2 nor 4:10 does he refer to the death of Christ. He simply speaks of the risen Lord (2:1, *pros ton patera*) and of the total mission of Jesus (4:10). The *hilasmos* is not one-sidedly linked with the single achievement of death, but with the total person and work of Jesus, of which His death is, of course, an indissoluble part, 5:6, cf. 3:16; 1:7. Jesus is our expiation as the One who has fulfilled the purpose of His sending, who has been kept in perfect love (3:17) and who is perfectly righteous, 2:2.

Williams and the NIV translate the word as “the atoning sacrifice for our sins”; TEV translates “the means by which sins are forgiven”; NEB translates “the remedy for the defilement of our sins”; NASB translates “the propitiation for our sins”; Barclay translates “the propitiating sacrifice for our sins”; and Beck “He has paid for our sins.”

B. Power of Love (4:11-18)

4:11: “Beloved if God so loved us we ought also to love one another”

The word “beloved” occurs for its eleventh and final time in this letter. The word “if” (*ei*) indicates a first class clause which assumes reality and may more properly be translated “since.”

It is a startling and sufficient truth: “God’s love serves not only as a sufficient example but as a stimulating cause. Our love should flow naturally from God’s love which we have experienced” (Blaney, 391).

4:12: “No one has seen God at any time; if we may love one another God is remaining in us and His love is being fulfilled in us”

The efforts and means throughout history which people have made or attempted in order to see God have all been futile, deadend streets. After all, by His very nature and character, “He cannot be made visible to the eyes of

man” (Brooke, 120). However, He can be made known “through His self-revelation of love in Jesus Christ” (Blaney, 391).

By the experience and expression of that love, “His love is fulfilled in us.”

The word “fulfilled” (*teteleiomene*) is a perfect tense verb which may be translated “perfected” (KJV, NASB, Williams). However, this does not imply or denote any kind of moral sinlessness or ethical perfection, as the word is commonly understood. Rather, it may be understood in three different ways:

(1) “it is not God’s love for us that is perfected [or brought to fulfillment] . . . but our love for the brethren is brought to its most complete expression”

(Blaney, 391, 392). Robertson (23) supports this position: we love one another because God’s love “is remaining in us.” In the words of Brooke (120), “mutual love is a sign of the indwelling of God in men. ‘Through our love for each other (as Christians) we build the Temple in which God can dwell in and among us’ (Rothe).”

(2) Ross (204), however, states that the meaning is our love for God that is brought to completion. That is, “as the result of the Divine indwelling, the love of God, that is, our love to God (as in 2:5; 3:17 and 5:3) grows from more to more until it is perfected” (204) or brought to its highest and fullest experience and expression.

(3) Later, however, Brooke (120) says that it may refer to God’s love for us: “God’s love to men is realized most fully in His condescending to abide in men. His love for men receives its most perfect expression in His giving Himself to men, and entering into fellowship with them.”

Best wishes in your hermeneutical endeavors here.

4:13: “In this we know that we remain in Him and He in us because He has given permanently to us from His Spirit”

The words “in this” (*en touto*) set the stage for proofs or verifications of our partnership/fellowship with God. In fact, “the Christian’s consciousness of the fact of God’s love dwelling in him is due to the Spirit of God whom God has given” (Robertson, 233). The word “given” (*dedoken*) is in the perfect tense and indicates that this *gift* is permanent. We, therefore, “know” [experientially] that we are in Him and He is in us by the presence of the Holy Spirit “which certifies the indwelling of God” (Vaughan, 108). That is, “the Spirit in our hearts is the seal and assurance of our union with God” (Sawtelle, 151).

4:14: “and we have seen and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son [to be] the Saviour of the world”

In addition to the internal witness of the Spirit, there is the external witness of eye-witnesses about the life and ministry of Jesus while He was physically on the earth. This verse is a spinoff of v. 12.

The word “Saviour” (*sotera*) occurs here only in this letter and 23 other times

in the NT. See my article “Saviour: God’s Graceful Gesture” on my personal website: archive.org/details/@mandm313.

Here, the term “Saviour” is a spinoff of “expiation” (*hilasmon*) in v. 10.

4:15: “if someone may confess that Jesus is the Son of God God remains in him and he in God”

This verse is a spinoff of 3:24. This confession “makes this belief the guiding principle of his life and action, [and] is assured of the truth of his fellowship with God” (Brooke, 122).

4:16: “and we have come to know and have believed the love which God has in us God is love and the one who remains in love remains in God and God remains in him”

Here John links two verbs, “know” and “believe,” into a meaningful chain. Both of these verbs are in the perfect tense, indicating “to know – and still knowing” -- “believe – and still believing.” That is, both are lasting, ongoing experiences.

The verb “believe” has its noun counterpart in the word “faith.” So, as Westcott, 155) observes: “we must have a true if limited knowledge of the object of faith before true faith can exist; and true faith opens the way to fuller knowledge.” The joining of these two links indicates “the intimate relation of spiritual knowledge and belief” (Vaughan, 110). They are inseparable. Since God is love (in character), the way to abide or remain in love is to abide or remain in God and to confess Jesus as God’s Son (v. 15).

4:17: “in this love has been perfected with us in order that we may have confidence in the day of judgment because as that one is so also are we in this world”

“In this” is love brought to completion – that is, in “our union with God and God with us” (Lias, 336).

The purpose (*hina*) of such is that we may have “confidence” (*parresia*) (NASB, Williams) or “boldness” (KJV) on judgment day. This is the third occurrence of this word in this letter (2:28; 3:21). The word means “openness, frankness, assurance” and is “evidence that our love has been perfected” (Vaughan, 112).

The way by which this happens is due to “as that one is, so also are we in this world.” That is, “those who are like their Judge, can await with confidence the result of His decrees” (Brooke, 124) on judgment day.

The reason why this is true is now forthcoming: “as Christ is one with the Father, in inseparable fellowship with Him, so we are indissolubly united with Him, although we are still in this world and while we are still in this world” (Haupt, 277).

4:18: “it is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear because fear has punishment and the one who fears has not been perfected in love”

This love is such that it is devoid of “fear” or the opposite of this confidence and has absolutely no place or position in love; they are mutually exclusive and cannot co-exist.

Instead of confidence, fear contains punishment. That is, “as it gazes forward, it can think only of that punishment which is to be meted out to the finally impenitent (Mt. 25:46, the only other place in the N.T. where the noun here used occurs); this kind of fear has in it a foretaste of that future punishment. He who is mastered by it is very far indeed from being made perfect in love” (Ross, 207) in the here and now or the future!

C. Practice of Love (4:19-5:4)

4:19: “we may love because He first loved us”

This verse is likely a spinoff of v. 8.

The Christian’s capacity to love originates in His love and cannot be experienced or expressed apart from Him. As Smith (192) puts it: “the amazing love of God in Christ is the inspiration of all the love that stirs in our hearts. It awakens in us an answering love – a grateful love for Him manifesting itself in love for our brethren (cf. ver. 11).”

The aorist tense verb “loved” refers to that moment in history where the ultimate manifestation of God’s love occurred.

4:20: “if some one may say ‘I love God’ and may hate his brother he is a liar for the one who is not loving his brother whom he has seen is not able to love God whom he has not seen”

In the words of Ralph Carmichael’s song, “Love is Surrender”:

Talk about love How it makes life complete
You can talk all you want Make it sound good and sweet
But the words have an empty ring
And they don’t really mean a thing
Without Him love is not to be found.
For love is surrendere to His will.

False verbal claims are here repudiated, as they were in 1:6; 2:4.

If someone talks love but does not walk it, he is here classified as one who “hates” his brother. Without concern for political correctness, John “classifies everything less than active, self-sacrificing dedication to the welfare of others as hatred” (Tolbert, 100).

This is the fifth occurrence of the word “hatred” (*mise*) – 2:9, 11, 3:13, 15 – all with the exception of v. 13 in reference to “hating his brother.” He is also called “a liar” (*pseustes*) – the fourth occurrence of this word (1:10; 2:4, 22) which will occur again in 5:10. A liar is “a hypocrite, a man who lives in self-deception, one who consciously or unconsciously is living in illusion and unreality” (Hoon, 288). It is the absence of love for a Christian brother whom is “seen” which “disqualifies a man for life with God [whom he has not seen]; he **cannot love God**” (Ibid.).

4:21: “and we have this commandment from Him that the one who loves God also loves his brother”

“There is no real love to God which does not show itself in obedience to His commands” (Dodd, 123) – specifically that of loving one another/one’s brother.

5:1: “Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God and remains so and every one who loves the one born loves also the one born of Him”

Again, the verb “believes” (*pisteuon*) means the same as the noun “faith” (*pistis*) which only occurs in this letter at 5:4 – commitment and surrender to God. “Nothing less will satisfy John, not merely intellectual conviction, but full surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour” (Robertson, 237). This “faith [is] the sign of the Birth from God” (Brooke, 127).

This “love has its origin in the nature of God and is not merely an affection of human nature. . . The truth of our claim to love God is shown in our attitude towards the brethren” (Ibid.).

The words “Jesus is the Christ” stresses the identity of Jesus as being the Christ or Messiah or Anointed One of God Who became flesh and blood in Him. One aspect of the gnostic teaching was that the Christ came upon Him at His baptism and then left Him before the Crucifixion. John’s expression is a bold and flat denial of this gnostic claim.

The verb “has been born and remains so” is in the perfect tense, denoting a present state or condition of reality. So, the translation indicates “and remains so.”

A Christians’ love for God naturally – or supernaturally – flows over into love for other Christians.

5:2: “By this we know that we love the children of God whenever we love God and may keep His commandments”

It is in “this” fact – of loving God and the children of God – that we know we are keeping His commandments: of love and meeting the needs of others. Indeed, “the highest service that any man can render to humanity is to ‘love

God and keep His commandments” (Law, 254).

5:3: “for this is the love of God that we may keep His commandments and His commandments are not burdensome”

If ever there was a concrete definition of what it means to love God, here it is: to keep on keeping His commandments, which are not “burdensome” (*bareiai*) or “grievous, heavy, difficult . . . love makes easy and blessed those commands which are crossing to the old nature. In the doing of them difficulties melt away, and there is freedom and delight” (Sawtelle, 55). BAG (133-134): “*difficult to fulfill; troublesome; fierce, cruel, savage*” are overturned by love. Indeed, Barclay (104) says: “Love turned the burden into no burden at all. It must be so with us and Christ. His commandments are not a burden but a privilege and an opportunity to show our love.”

Robertson (238) translates, “not heavy . . . Love for God lightens his commands.” This word occurs first in Mt. 23:4; 23:23; Ac. 20:29; 25:7; 2 Cor. 10:10. Schrenk (557-558) elaborates:

Love of God is essentially directed to the keeping of His commands. But if it is then said that these are not heavy, this is not an optimistically rational reference to human ability and good will. The basis of the statement is that the one who is born of God overcomes in virtue of faith in the Son of God, who has already won the victory over the *kosmos*, this *kosmos* which threatens the keeping of the commands. The commands are not hard to keep because the believer can draw on the perfect triumph of Christ.

5:4: “because every one who has been born of God is overcoming the world and this is the victory which overcame the world our faith”

The word “because” (*hoti*) provides the reason why His commandments are not grievous: “in the new birth we come into a state of victory, actually begun, and ideally complete” (Sawtelle, 155).

The verb “is overcoming” (*vika*) is in the present tense and involves the continuation of victory; it is a victory which is continuous and in progress.

“The word” is the world of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of possessions” (2:16) – all that is in opposition to the will of God; all the forms of deceit and depravity which are adverse or hostile to God.

This “victory” is further tagged as one “which overcame [aorist tense – a point in past time] when their “faith” was initially exercised. This verb has been subject to at least 4 potential meanings: (1) as here, “the initial victory won by the Christian in his conversion” (Vaughan, 117); (2) constative: a summing up of the

action of victory in its entirety (Dana and Mantey, 196; Law, 256); (3) the first verb “is overcoming” is present tense because the fight is in progress, then the second “overcame” because the triumph is assured” (Smith, 194); (4) the victory of the Christians over the false teachings of the gnostics (cf. 2:19; 4:4) (Brooke, 117).

Whichever conclusion one may reach, the victory of “faith” is secure; it yields no room for doubts and fits each of the alternative interpretations above.

D. Progress of Love (5:5)

5:5: “who is the one overcoming the world if not the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

In this question, John again uses the present tense verb “is overcoming” because the victorious struggle/contest/fight is one that clearly continues.

As Plummer, *Epistle*, 157 frames it: “The faith that conquers is no mere vague belief in the existence of God, but a definite belief in the Incarnation.” That is, that Jesus is the Son of God in flesh and blood.

In v. 1, John stresses that Jesus is the Christ. Here he stresses that He is the Son of God, making them “virtually synonymous” (Marshall, 231). Therefore, there is no other way of conquering the world. The one who “believes” or has faith in Him cannot fail in this regard. This victory has already happened once (5:4) and is in the process of continuous victory after victory.

VII WITNESSES TO LIFE (5:6-12)

A. Particulars: Water and Blood (5:6a)

5:6: “this is the one who came by water and blood Jesus Christ - not by the water alone but by the water and the blood;

The word “came” (*elthon*) is a point action aorist tense verb which refers to the fact that He “came” from heaven to earth in the Incarnation.

The word “water” (*hudatos*) refers to His baptism where He publicly committed Himself to be the Suffering Servant.

The word “blood” (*haimatos*) refers to His crucifixion where He publicly carried out His commitment to be the Suffering Servant.

The modified repetition of the phrase “blood and water” now includes the article (“the”): “by the water and the blood. ”

B. Pneuma: Spirit (5:6b-8)

5:6b: “and the Spirit is the One Who bears witness because the Spirit is the truth”

At His baptism, Jesus was “specially consecrated for His public work, and endowed with the Spirit which enabled Him to carry it out” (Brooke, 133). To say that “the Spirit is the truth” means that He is “*the* witness-bearer” (Brooke, 136) - “He *is* Truth and can speak only Truth. His witness, therefore, can be relied on, when He testifies to the fact that Jesus was not only the Son of God at His baptism but also when he shed His precious blood amid the agonies and the dereliction of the Cross” (Ross, 214).

Blaney adds that even though there were many other baptisms and crucifixions before Jesus, “and even the baptism and death of the Christ were virtually unnoticed in the secular annals; but the Spirit-inspired history of the Church has kept these two great events alive and made them witnesses to the deity of Jesus Christ” (400).

5:7: “for there are three that bear witness”

These three witnesses all speak or declare or establish the single truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

This statement is loaded with legal significance to ensure that the witness is valid and trustworthy. By stating that there are three that bear witness, John is declaring that “it fulfills the conditions of legally valid witness, as laid down in Dt. 19:15.

5:8: “the Spirit and the water and the blood and these three are for one thing”

These three witnesses “are for the one thing, tend in the same direction, exist for the same object. They all work towards the same result, the establishing of the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (Brooke, 137). This, of course, squares with the very reason that John wrote his Gospel (20:31).

C. Pater: Father (5:9-12)

5:9: “if/since we receive the witness of men the witness of God is greater for this is the witness of God that He has borne witness concerning His Son”

The word “if” (*ei*) begins another first class conditional clause which assumes reality and is better translated “since.” In ordinary judicial proceedings, we tend to accept the testimonies which are presented to satisfy the conditions of legal intervention and assessment of cases. This clause may also refer to the testimonies of the apostles and other key witnesses of Jesus about His life and ministry.

John declares, however, that no matter how valuable key witnesses may be, as just noted, God’s Divine witness concerning Jesus at His baptism, His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4), His ascension and exaltation to His

right hand as eternal Mediator/High Priest is “greater” (*meizon*); that is, “of greater significance and trustworthiness” (Marshall, 239).

After all, since the following verb “born witness” (*memartureken*) is in the perfect tense, God’s witness is one that continues to exist in a state of completion or accomplishment; it is irreversible and cannot be cancelled.

God’s witness is one that is authoritatively and conclusively born and is, necessarily, final.

5:10: “the one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself, the one who does not believe in God has made Him a liar because he has not believed the witness which God has affirmed concerning His Son

In addition to the witness of the water, the blood, the Spirit, and the Father, is the witness of personal experience: the believer’s inward witness. This is a subjective testimony of an objective reality.

The one who does not have this witness of personal experience because he does not believe has, of course, insulted God as “a liar.” This is the final occurrence of this word (1:10; 2:4, 22; 4:20. This failure to believe is due to the unbeliever’s lack of trust in the truthfulness of God, thereby regarding Him as “a liar.”

The verbs “has made” and “has not believed” are both in the perfect tense indicating a past act which created a present condition.

A person is faced with a choice: believe or not believe. As Westcott (187) notes: “When the crisis of choice came he refused the message: he made God a liar: he did not believe on His testimony: and the result of that decision entered into him and clings to him.”

5:11: “and this is the witness that God has given eternal life to us and this life is in His Son”

The substance or essence of God’s witness is that He “has permanently given” (*edoken* – perfect tense) eternal life to us” who believe. This life is “the opposite of exclusion from God” (Plummer, *PC*, 141). It is a present and permanent possession. It is “a particular *quality* of life which emanates from God, rather than a mere extension of existence. For man, it is the reception and enjoyment of the essential life of God Himself through Christ, the channel, by the Holy Spirit, the agent. It is a gracious participation in the very life of God” (Shank, 21-22). As Robertson says, “It is more than endless, for it is sharing in the life of God in Christ (Jn. 5:26; 17:3; 1 John 5:12)” (50).

Again, for an expanded look at the meaning of this expression, see my article “Eternal Life: Misunderstanding and Meaning” on my personal website: archive.org/details/@mandm313.

5:12: “the one who has the Son has the life the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life”

John’s “sober conclusion is that life from God is mediated to men not through one who was not truly human or not truly divine, but through one who was both human and divine” (McDowell, 222).

This eternal life is not a packaged deal for the whole world en masse.

It is given individually on the basis of faith.

“In describing the unbeliever John varies his language in a significant way: he describes the unbeliever not merely as one who has not the Son, but as one who has not the Son *of God*. The unbeliever needs to be reminded whose Son He is whom he spurns (Jn. 3:36)” (Ross, 218).

VIII WRITTEN TO KNOW (5:13-20)

A. Possession of Eternal Life (5:13)

5:13: “I have written these things to you in order that you may know that you have eternal life to those who believe in the name of the Son of God”

This is the last occurrence of the word “written” in the aorist tense (cp. 2:14, 21, 26). There is some uncertainty as to whether it refers to “these things” in the entire letter or to 5:1-12. But there is no uncertainty regarding his purpose: “that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Through this letter, John has used two different words for “know”: *ginosko* (2:3, 4, 5, 13, 14, 18, 29; 3:1, 6, 16, 19, 20, 24; 4:2, 6, 7, 8, 13, 16; 5:2; and will use again in 5:20. The other word is *oida* (2:11, 20, 21; 3:2, 5, 14, 15; here, and will use again in 5:15 [twice], 18, 19, 20.

With regard to *ginosko*, Bultmann (711-712) comments:

The word denotes emphatically the relationship to God and to Jesus as a personal fellowship in which each is decisively determined by the other in his own existence. . . . It is the supreme and true mode of being, and is understood to be *agape*. God is *agape*, so that the man who is related to Him is related to as one who loves (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). To be determined by love is thus a criterion of the knowledge of God (1 Jn. 4:7 f.; cf. 4:20 f.), as also belonging to Jesus (Jn. 13:35). . . . Hence it is plain that *ginoskein* does not mean the knowledge of investigation, observation or speculation, nor of mystical vision remote from historical contacts or action; it achieves concrete expression in historical acts. The *agape* of God for the *kosmos* is actualized in the sending of the Son (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9 f.). . . . Since the knowledge of Jesus or of God expresses itself accordingly in

agapan, observing the commandments (which have in *agape* their content) might also be called a criterion of *ginoskein* (I Jn. 2:3-5; cf. 3:6). . . . *ginoskein* has primarily the sense of the recognition and reception of love, i.e., *pistis* [“faith”]. . . . The word means understanding Him in His obedience and love. . . The world does not know Him, but the community does, because He determines its being.

In this verse, the use of *eidete* [perfect tense of *oida*] stresses a state or condition of being for “more absolute, self-evident truth” (Law, 405); what Robertson (242) calls, “settled intuitive knowledge” in relation to “eternal life” (1:2; 2:25; 3:15; 5:11 – and 5:20).

B. Prayers are Effective (5:14-17)

5:14: “and this is the confidence which we have toward Him that whatever we may ask according to His will He hears us

The word “confidence” (*parresia*) occurs here for the fourth and final time in this letter (2:28; 3:21; 4:17). It occurs in reference to prayer. John, of course, mentioned confidence and prayer in 3:21-22. Here, John adds that for prayer to be effective, it must be in accordance with God’s will. As Law (301) notes, prayer “consists not in bringing God’s will down to us, but in lifting our will up to His.”

The word “hears” (*akouei*) indicates that God comprehends, understands, and is responsive to such prayers, not just that He listens or listened.

5:15: “and if we know that He hears us whatever if we may ask we know that we have the requests which we have requested from Him”

Again, John uses the perfect tense verb “know” (*oidamen*) twice in this verse. The latter indicates “the confidence of possession by anticipation” (Robertson, 243), even though “our actual entering upon possession may be indefinitely delayed” (Brooke, 144).

The verb “requested” (*etekamen*) is also in the perfect tense to denote an abiding state of being. That is, “when the Divine gift at last rests in our hands, it may be something far more wonderful than we had ever dreamt of getting (3:22)” (Ross, 220).

5:16: “If anyone may see his brother sinning a sin not toward death, he shall ask and He shall give him life to those who commit sin not to death; there is a sin toward death: I do not say about that one that he may ask”

The word “may see” (*ide*) is an aorist tense and refers to a “personal obser-

vation” (Law, 407),

The phrase “sinning a sin” is not found anywhere else in the NT. The word “sinning” (*hamartanonta*) is in the present tense and indicates a chronic, ongoing course of sinning and not some specific act. Indeed, John does not say

Nevertheless, it leads to the mention of two different kinds of sin: (1) one that does not lead to death and (2) one which does.

(1) “not toward death” (*me pros thanaton*) – sinning in the case of a brother must be corrected and restoration take place: cp. 2:1; Gal. 6:1; Mt. 18:15; Jms. 5:20. “He shall ask” – “intercessory prayer is the antidote for scandal in the Church” (Findlay, 404). The change from “him” to “them” makes this more of a general statement. For God to give “life” to “those who are committing sin not toward death” means forgiveness and eternal life.

Marshall (248) states: “sins that do not lead to death are those which are committed unwittingly and which do not involve rejection of God and his way of salvation. The sinner is overcome by temptation against his will; he still wants to love God and his neighbor, he still believes in Jesus Christ, he still longs to be freed from sin.” Indeed, John is not saying that there is “a” or “some” kind of sin “that lies beyond redemption, from which even the blood of Christ cannot cleanse the soul” (Findlay, 409).

(2) “sin toward death” - it does not say that the “brother” is the one who may commit this sin; it refers to people like the gnostic false teachers. It denotes those who are “cold-hearted toward their brethren and disbelief in the Divine-human person of Jesus Christ, stigmatized by John as antichrists . . . full and deliberate unbelief in Jesus Christ, due to moral antipathy [which] is fatal to the soul” (Findlay, 406, 407). Cp. Jn. 3:18-19; 8:24; 9:39.

This may be the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which has no forgiveness in this life or the life to come (Mt. 12:32-33; Mk. 3:29). This would consist of staying in the state of sin of rejecting the call of the Spirit to salvation. Marshall (247-248) elaborates:

It is plain that the author is most concerned about the sins which are incompatible with being a child of God, and these are summed up in denial that Jesus is the Son of God, refusal to obey God’s commands, love of the world, and hatred of one’s brothers. Such sins are characteristic of the person who belongs to the sphere of darkness rather than light. This would lead to the conclusion that by sin that leads to death John means the sins that are incompatible with being a child of God. The person who consciously and deliberately chooses the way that leads to death will surely die. Sin that leads to death is deliberate refusal to believe in Jesus Christ, to follow God’s commands, and to love one’s brothers.

However, if the “sin toward death” means physical, and if it entails Christians,

it may occur because of lying to the Holy Spirit (Ananias and Sapphira = Acts 5:1-11), dishonorable behavior at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20-30), or sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5:3-5).

Physical death for the Christian may also occur because of refusal to apply themselves faithfully to the fulfilling of God's mission for them in the sanctification aspect of their salvation. This, of course, happened to the Israelites who had been delivered from Egyptian slavery and who because of their failure to "serve Him in the wilderness" (Ex. 7:16) suffered physical death. It did not cancel or annul their original deliverance but it did cancel or annul their service of sanctification. Plus, they were thus prevented from entering the promised land. This scenario lies behind and impacts the interpretation of Heb. 6:6 – which see for elaboration in my commentary on Hebrews: archive.org/details/@mandm313. The statement: "I do not say about that one that he may ask," means "and to pray for its remission is to pray for an impossibility; it is to pray against an absolute decree. It is to pray for a salvation outside of Christ and the Holy Spirit. In fact, there can be no spirit of prayer in that behalf. . . . The 'death,' of course, would be understood as the state that is destitute of the new life, which John has so fully marked in the context" (Sawtelle, 61).

5:17: "all unrighteousness is sin and there is a sin not toward death"

In actuality, all sin is toward death until it is forgiven. It is "a disease of the soul, a deviation from the true end of man's life; any and every sin, so far as it goes and so long as it lasts, severs the committer from fellowship with God" (Findlay, 407).

In 3:4, sin is equal to lawlessness; here unrighteousness is sin – these two expressions are "complementary" (Findlay, 408).

So, "all unrighteousness is sin" – that is, "every social injustice and unkindness, every failure to deal with one another as one would wish to be dealt with, every moral offence is sin" (Ibid), and "there is a sin not toward death" when the person engaged in such sin repents, exercises faith in Jesus Christ, and is delivered from spiritual death. This truth leads directly to the power of Jesus to provide such deliverance.

B. Power of Jesus (5:18)

5:18: "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not practice sinning but He Who produced this birth of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him"

In fact, "we know" (*oidamen*) that those who have been born into the family of God, who love God and one another, etc. do not practice sinning habitually. The nature of God, and those who because of the new birth are now "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pt. 1:4), prohibit such habitual practice.

Even though a Christian is no longer under the dominion or mastery of sin and whose lifestyle is not one of flagrant disregard of God and His will, there may be periodic slips into sinful acts. Cp. 2:1-3.

When such slips occur, however, there is no reason for ultimate despair and giving up on God. After all, Christ (as the One Who produced this birth of God) serves as “a vigilant Guardian [against] a malignant foe” (Smith, 198) and “the evil one does not touch him” in the sense that the evil one can grasp him or snatch him away from God (Robertson, 245). Cp. Jn. 6:38f.

The word “keeps” (*terei*) is a present tense verb indicating Christ’s constant guardianship of keeping us in His custody, maintaining a firm hold, a being kept under guard by the One Who said of the evil one: “he has no power over Me” (Jn. 14:30; 17:15). Thus, the matter of security for the Christian “is not our grip on Christ but His grip on us” (Smith, 199).

C. Promise of God (5:19)

5:19: “we know that we are of God and the whole world lies in the wicked one”

Again, the word “we know” (*oidamen*) communicates the assurance that our relationship with God is secured and “safeguarded by him” (Wilder, *IB*, 301). This is not true of the world at large. It is dominated by wickedness and the desires of the world: “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of possessions” (2:16). This word “lies” (*keimai*) or, as the present tense verb indicates, is “continually” in its existence under the grasp of the evil one – unlike Christians who are under the grasp of God’s Christ.

As Barclay (121) comments: “But the Christian is the man who never can lose the battle. Because he is a man, he will sin; but he never can experience the utter moral defeatedness of the pagan.”

D. Person of Jesus Christ (5:20)

5:20: “we know that Son of God has come and has given to us understanding so that we know the True One and we are in the True One in His Son Jesus Christ this is the true God and eternal life”

The third “we know” (*oidamen*) is a confident declaration of truth that the Son of God has come in the incarnation to provide proof of God as the One and only True One. Plus, we are “in the True One in the sphere of our connection with God in His Son Jesus Christ.”

The word “understanding” (*dianoian*) occurs here only in all of John’s writings. It means “intelligence, thinking, disposition” (BAG, 186) in the area of divine dealings with people. In other words, “the Christian is conscious that he has entered into that reality which is of God. Life is full of illusions and imper-

manencies; by himself man can but guess and grope; but in Christ he enters into the knowledge of reality which is God. The time of guessing is gone and the time of knowing has come” (Barclay, 122-123).

“Throughout his writings he [John] has promoted and defended the full divinity of Christ. To lose this one conviction is to miss not just Jesus but God himself” (Burge, 218).

So, since the reality is God and God is the reality, He is the One and Only “true God” in whom alone is “eternal life” and with Whom to be connected is to experience the very life of God Himself which is “eternal life.”

IX WATCH OUT FOR IDOLS (5:21)

5:21: “Little children, guard yourselves from idols”

The tender term “little children” (*teknia*) which has regularly appeared in this letter (2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4) most appropriately occurs in this closing statement.

John’s final imperative is an aorist tense verb which calls for immediate action, “to be undertaken at once” (Dana and Mantey, 300). It is accompanied by the reflexive pronoun “yourselves” (*heauta*) which “accents the need of effort on their part” (Robertson, 246): take the responsibility to “guard yourselves from idols.”

This imperative “is an appropriate exhortation in the light of John’s exaltation of the God **who is true** and his Son Jesus Christ who **has given us understanding, to know him who is true**” (v. 20).

How do we guard against idolatry?

W. Jones (169) offers these few suggestions:

The most effective preservative against idolatry is growing fidelity to God. The worship of anything less than God dwarfs and degrades man’s spiritual nature. God has made us for himself, and our souls cannot rest until they rest in him. The exercise of real worship transforms the worshipper into likeness to the object worshipped: e.g. the idolatry of riches will gradually mould man into a grovelling, grasping miser; of power, into a ruthless, despotic tyrant, etc. The worship of anything less than God will lead to bitter disappointment and irretrievable loss. Sooner or later, the idolater will be awakened from his delusions, and then he will find that his god is a poor sham, and that, as for himself, he has ‘forsaken the Fountain of living waters, and hewed him out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.’ And how terrible is death to the idolater! And when he dies he must leave his idols behind him.

Blaney (405) notes that “this Epistle still speaks today because he gives voice to the living Word of God. How well he succeeds in this task depends on how well we hear and how well, under God, we make today’s history. Amen!”

Malcolm Tolbert (124) addresses this imperative in relevant and rigorous terms:

Religion is idolatrous when it makes us self-righteous, unfeeling and harsh. Church is an idol when it gets us involved in a lot of activities that keep us from serving God. In fact, it can be a very dangerous idol, because when we are busy with religious programs we may get the idea that we are serving God. Culture and country can be idols if they, instead of God, determine our moral standards and style of life. . . . We need to recognize that idolatry is very persuasive and often difficult to define. We need the warning with which 1 John ends, therefore, just as much as do people who worship crude images of clay or stone: *'Little children, keep yourselves from idols.'*

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